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THE MICMAC

S. CARLETON

Christine N. Taylor
Texas 1912

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By Susan Jones

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THE MICMAC

or

"The Ribboned Way"

BY

S. Carleton

With Three Decorations by ADAM EMPIE

NEW YORK
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1904

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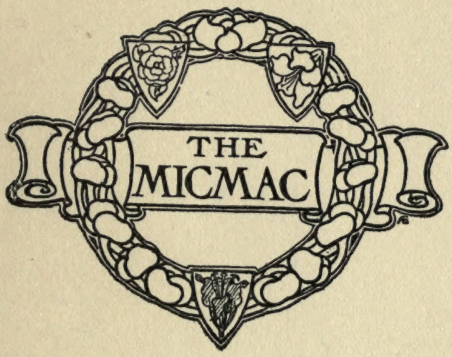
PUBLISHERS' NOTE

THIS book is founded on a shorter and considerably different story originally published in Ainslee's Magazine under the title of "The Ribboned Way."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CHAPTER I

BILLY MOULTON, the leader of cotillions, the coveted of solicitous mothers, the adored of women in his own set, lay flat on his back on the top of a high rock, and yawned luxuriously.

He had been fishing and walking since daybreak, and with repose, a great peace possessed his soul. He had lain motionless for a good half hour, when he finally pushed his cap more comfortably under his dark head, and unclosed his eyes.

Over his head a tall pine tree spread delicate grey-green network against the pale, ineffable crystal of the noon sky, and up and down its trunk fussed a yellow squirrel, and scolded at him. A soft breath of wind came and stirred the sleeves of his flannel shirt, but it brought no sound with it except the

angry chatter of the squirrel, till a match spat viciously on the ground eight feet below. From the foot of the rock arose a slow film of wood-smoke and scattered as it took the breeze; the yellow squirrel, with a splutter of fury, ran up its tree and vanished; Moulton laughed, and sat up.

"Joe," he said, hanging his legs over the edge of the boulder, and looking down, "we're trespassers here. The owner doesn't like us."

An Indian, on his knees, by a creeping blaze, looked up and laughed, too.

"Not very much power, that owner! Down there now," he pointed over his shoulder, "very much different."

"Where d'ye mean, down there?" Moulton knew better than to put any interest into his voice.

He had been peculiarly brought up, and had peculiar tastes, for a millionaire. As a boy he had been allowed to run wild in the Canadian wilderness till he grew up blood-

brother to Indians, beasts, and the wind that blows through the trees. Now, at thirty, he was about the best-looking, and absolutely the most sought-after man in New York; and financially and socially a power in the land—in the winter! It was not once in a summer he was seen of men, or women. With every June he vanished silently to the eastern woods, and the free life that makes a man or breaks him, and every summer Joe Julian, companion of his childhood, met him wherever he was pleased to go. He was stuffed to the brim with the thoughts and superstitions of the woods, and spoke Indian no worse than Joe did English. They used the two interchangeably, except when they were displeased with one another. Moulton repeated his casual question now, as Joe would have done, in soft gutturals:

"What's down there?"

There was no answer.

From his eminence he surveyed the country for himself, and saw it was just plain

swamp. He was on the inner slope of a long, narrow valley, the already westering sun on his left shoulder, and all the hollow between him and the opposite edge of hills was swamp, rank with nameless green. Here and there a path seemed to run through it, and at intervals were bare places and water. The air over it quivered in the white, implacable sunlight, but otherwise it was an innocent-looking place enough, two miles or so across, and he could not see how long. It occurred to him that to cross the tail of it after the morning fishing would be a great saving to his legs.

"Doesn't Big Lake Teâm lie just across there?" he inquired suddenly.

Joe nodded.

"Then why don't we go there now, instead of back to the camp? May as well try the big lake for the evening fishing!"

"Too far!" Joe had removed himself to a little spring that welled up between two mossy rocks, and was cleaning trout with a

couple of flicks of knife and hand. He cut a long, forked twig of hardwood, and dragged up some spruce roots.

"Too far! Why, it's no more than two miles over that swamp, man."

"Thirty mile to Big Lake Teâm," said the henchman stolidly. He came back to the fire, split the forks of his hardwood stick, slipped a trout into it, and made his gridiron fast with a damp, snaky spruce root. "Thirty mile," he repeated, arranging it over the fire.

"Across that place? You're cracked! I could be over there before you got those fish cooked. By George, they're beauties! If there are any better fish in the big lake, we'll risk your thirty miles when the sun drops."

Joe arose leisurely, leaving his fish to cook.

"Look, see!" said he, pointing a yellow finger to the southwest, "there the run, where we catch big fish this morning; there," the finger travelled south, "there

Little Lake Teâm, our camp. Over there," if his finger had been a compass needle it would not have deviated less, "northeast, Big Lake Teâm, thirty mile from where we stand." He relapsed into slow Indian, polished, emphatic. "That swamp is not so pretty as it looks! I do not cross it; no one crosses it. Some Indians have tried. Now we go round. It is not a nice place to die in, that swamp."

"Die in!" Moulton gaped at him. "Nobody ever died crossing a little place like that."

"Gee-Joe Brooks, and Ben Christmas, and the Frenchwoman's son, they died—in my day!" he returned slowly. "My father knew more. So now we go round. There is no pretty luck in that swamp."

Moulton turned with some severity.

"Frank Labrador told me he crossed the swamp from Big Lake Teâm to my camping place last summer."

"That way—yes! Not back again."

"But why?"

"We don't know." Joe was immediately stubborn in English. "We tell you what is, not why. That fish," detachedly, "most done."

"Um!" grunted Moulton. He wondered why Joe did not desire to go to Big Lake Teâm, but if he waited he would find out. In the meantime he ate pieces of browned pink trout off a bark plate, and watched the cooking-fire die down as the afternoon grew quiet, and the trees took a different colour against the sun. But when he had finished his first pipe, he filled it again, and addressed his placidly dozing retainer.

"I'm going to take a walk in that swamp. It's solid rot about not crossing it; it must be! You hang on here if you don't want to come."

"Very good; we stay." There was a curious flicker of expression on the face of Joe Julian, son of a chief, but his ragged sleeve hid it. He lay like a log as Moulton

went down the slope to the swamp, but as the first rock hid the splendid, sharply-moving figure, he arose unostentatiously, and melted into the landscape: even a chief's son does not get the chance to crow over his best friend too often.

Billy Moulton, happily oblivious, struck the edge of the maligned swamp and, by luck, what looked like a path.

"It's pretty wet, but it's a path all the same," he thought, progressing joyfully. "If I listened to all Joe's nonsense about this country, I'd never get anywhere. Thirty miles be hanged! I'll be trying for those big fish in the other lake by sundown." And his left foot went down into bottomless black water. When he pulled it out, his right foot went. Mr. Moulton sprang backwards with some haste. The place, of course, was not a quicksand, only a little difficult to manage. He altered his course a trifle, and set forth again.

From the hillside the swamp growths

looked comfortably low, but out here it was different. The bay bushes were up to his chest, and he was a tall man; and their tops were palpably browning in the glaring heat in spite of the swamp water that spurted up a foot above their roots. They smelt stifling strong, too, and their stems were as thickly set, and tough as galvanised-wire netting. Moulton was shoving through them with a careful eye on the point for which he was steering, when he struck a thicket of swamp maple so impenetrable that he was forced to go round it.

"Hullo!" he muttered. He pulled up standing, partly with surprise and partly because there was no more ground to walk on. He had come out on the edge of a wide pool, dark and glassy in the sun. It was rank with yellow lilies, and from the mud at his feet arose a waft of wild sweetness that reminded him of something familiar. In the heat and dazzle he stood and sniffed, but his memory would not work. The only thought

that came to him was the purely incongruous one of Mrs. Marescaux. It was a month since she had crossed his mind, and, with an odd feeling of something dimly understood, he realised that it was strange he should have forgotten so easily a woman who had been so much a part of his everyday existence as Tita Marescaux. Her presence, her rooms, her very gowns had held a peculiar fascination for him; and yet with the very instant she went out of his life all thought of her had gone, too. He did not hide from himself that it had been with a sort of relief that he had ceased to think of her and her chiffons and her rings. He saw no earthly reason why he should think of her now.

He looked down restlessly, and stood staring. The most extraordinary flower he had ever seen was growing at his feet. It was lifted high on a fine, leafless stalk, just four petals and some white stamens; but the four petals were coal black. A queer feeling went through him, for it was cer-

tainly the scent of that black flower that had reminded him of Tita. He picked it; and as he stood with the strange blossom in his hand it struck him that the dark pool with the yellow lilies was a nasty-looking pool, and that there was no sense in standing by it; the black flower which was his very own discovery, and probably new to botanists, looked suddenly unhealthy, monstrous. He threw it away with a quick jerk of his hand, but the light stem caught on his flannel sleeve. It clung there, unnoticed, as he retraced his steps a little, and worried through a clump of Labrador tea that was, like everything in the swamp, a foot higher than it had any right to be.

Joe Julian, on the hillside, grinned. Ten minutes later he ran to a better post of observation, and glared at the swamp. Moulton had vanished. The dark face under the shock of black hair was on the instant grim with anxiety. So had Ben Christmas vanished, and the Frenchwoman's son.

"*Sokbaâghmikt!*" he yelled, "go quick." And was apparently rewarded on the word. Moulton's disreputably clad shoulders and old cap reappeared like magic on the brink of the pool he had recently left. Mr. Moulton himself was occupied in profane annoyance, and heard nothing.

"It's the same pool!" said he wrathfully; and the sun, at that moment going behind the only cloud in the sky, left the still water black and sinister. There was certainly something about the pool which was distinctly not nice, and under the strong scent of the swamp flowers, the black, muddy rim of it smelt. It was also plainly idiotic that a man used to the woods, ploughing in broad daylight through scrub seldom higher than his head, should not be able to make a bee-line from one clearly seen spot to another; but he did not seem to be doing it. He was not even getting away from an undesirably feverish pond. Mr. Moulton set determinedly forth on a well-planned system

of angles which must work to admiration.

Half an hour afterwards he arrived unostentatiously at the dead cooking-fire, and sat down. His cap was gone, his dark hair streaked damply over his forehead, his flannel shirt moulded sharply to his skin; he was also adorned impartially all over with black mud. Joe Julian took no notice of him, by word or look, and the silence of the hillside struck Moulton as palpable and heavy.

"It's a little hell down there," he found his voice hastily. "You were all right about it. I couldn't get two hundred yards out. But it's beautiful, too," and the insignificant black flower he had incomprehensibly failed to throw away caught his eye where it clung to his sleeve. "Ugh," he said inconsequently, and shook the tiny horror to the ground, "every fish in all Big Lake Teâm may go to the bottom for all me, if I have to cross that place to get there! Come on;

let's go home." Little Lake Teâm seemed a clean, open, desirable spot after that horrible, sweet-smelling swamp. And yet, as he shouldered his basket of fish, he turned his head to look back at the place that had been too much for him.

"Look here, Joe," he exclaimed, "Frank Labrador crossed that place! There must be a way. Though I don't mind saying I couldn't find it."

"There is a way, but"—if Moulton had not been used to him he would never have known his voice was anxious, "we think very hard to find him."

"I can if Labrador can," Moulton returned crossly.

"Labrador," energetically, "is son of a devil! You like that swamp?"

"Lord, no!" said Moulton truthfully, remembering five minutes he would have been glad to forget, having employed them for something idiotically like panic. "No."

"Labrador like him—once! Not now,"

returned Joe enigmatically, and started off on a quick jog; he was desirous to get his friend and pupil out of that. For half an hour of walking he said nothing; then he called back from his ten yards of lead, "We most home. This our barren."

Moulton pushed through the trees and joined him.

They had come out on the top of the hill above their own camp, into the softness of the good afternoon breeze, sweet with wholesome blueberry and fern. The clean, everyday world had come back again. If it had not been for the mud on him he could never have believed he had been an hour struggling to get out of a two-cent bog. But all the same he was annoyed that he had been baffled there; it was a new and wholesome sensation for Billy Moulton. Joe, standing unnoticed beside him, turned one flashlight of black glance on him before he marched on down the hill.

"*Wâssowĕk*, one flower!" he mused. He

had never appeared conscious of any flower at all. It was not good, but it was better than a bunch of them.

Moulton whistled cheerfully as he reached his camp and his two tents. It was a place to dream of, let alone the fishing, and the comfortable elemental life where hostesses ceased from troubling and the idle were at rest. Bathed and changed and lying on a moosehide at his own door, he knew the wind that lulled him blew over ten miles of lake water, and uncounted miles of houseless woods, where the moose browsed, and the black bears shuffled up to the blueberry barrens. He was never lonely, but if he had been, Lane was due to arrive, and Lane was, and always had been, a sort of second self to him. He turned on his elbow, and was indolently aware of silence in the kinty, where there ought to have been voices. Noel, Joe's scullion and subordinate, had gone down the lake at grey dawn to see if Lane had come, and had apparently stayed

there. He shouted authoritatively from his moosehide.

"Joe! Hullo, what's wrong?" For the face of the arriving Joseph was not pleased.

"That Noel never come back."

"Well, it's early yet! He may have a load. Mr. Lane's stuff may be at Welsh's."

"Plenty time two hours ago. We think," gloomily, "he p'raps not come to-night. Only half sense that boy, anyway."

Moulton scanned the empty lake, following Joe's eyes. There was no sign of the errant Noel, who had been known to disappear before, for his own ends, and was only useful because he was beyond all praise in a canoe.

"There's nothing he could be waiting for," he assented resignedly. "I only hope there wasn't a letter, and he's lost it. Mr. Lane wouldn't like to be left to wait at a place like Welsh's."

Joe nodded, biting off a chew of tobacco.

"You fish to-morrow?" he inquired absently, his gaze on the lake.

"I don't know; I suppose so." Moulton turned a surprised stare on him, and spoke with a flash of affectionate comprehension. "You old idiot! I believe you think I mean to go back to that swamp and have another try at drowning myself."

"Don't you try that no more," Joe turned on him solemnly. "Even Labrador only try once."

"Why?" asked Moulton; but he knew. He had not made a fool of himself in that swamp for nothing.

Joe fell into English.

"We don' know. The place is a bad place. Some Indian say——"

"What? It's all rot, Joe! The only trouble is that you're afraid of it."

Joe's open mouth shut like a trap.

"P'raps! We mos' forget." He stooped, picked up a caterpillar, and swore inwardly as he murdered it. Indian talk was not

good for white men, even Moulton; he should have been silent about the swamp, unless he had desired to lose the man in it. He shifted the conversation with a palpable jerk.

"We hear some news yesterday. Noel tell me some man have house now on Big Lake Teâm."

There was a pause, blank with annoyance. Moulton had no desire for neighbours on Big or Little Lake Teâm.

"Well, that man can stay there!" he announced irritably. "I'm glad of your beastly swamp now; he'll have to do the thirty miles round before he interferes with me." He had no curiosity at all as to who the man was. "What are you looking at?" sharply.

Joe pointed down the lake.

"Here come Noel, round that point. He got someone with him in canoe."

"Lane," said Moulton. He found with surprise that he was somehow inhospitably sorry. He picked up a field glass that lay at

his elbow. "Great Scott," he muttered blankly, as he caught the moving canoe, "that's not Lane! It's—it's a woman. It's "—his hand dropped to his side as if it were paralysed—"Mrs. Marescaux; Tita!"

CHAPTER II

TITA it was; and as she saw the tall figure on the shore there was a look on her face which was half fear and half triumph.

The triumph conquered, as she told herself to forget that she was arriving alone in the deep woods at the camp of a man whom she had choked off from proposing to her, and to remember only what she must.

A week ago she had realised what it meant to move always with the smartest and richest people you knew, and be living on your capital all the time. For the capital had quite placidly come to an end, and left her sitting for the last time in her lovely flat, and thinking it was lucky the crash had not come in the winter.

She had no relatives, and for friends had but people whose houses she could not afford to stay in. She had been a widow for

five years, and had gone where it was amusing; not where it was profitable. If she had always known there must some day be a financial crisis, she had known it gaily; something would be sure to turn up; there would be a way out somehow. But when the end came, it seemed simply the end. An invitation to camp with the Kilgores, who were new people, and not successful, was her only hope for board and lodging; she could be useful to the Kilgores—and be despised by all her world for it! But it was her only alternative from starving; or having people "be kind to her!"—to Mrs. Marescaux, who was used to ride at horse shows, to adorn smart parties, to be amused and flattered, and made much of. She could never, never bear that. And her thought glanced at the remembrance of a man who had loved her, and she had choked off.

She had been a fool not to marry Billy Moulton there and then; but the end had seemed very far off then, and it was no use

weeping over spilt milk now. Billy would not show up till autumn, and by autumn she must have found out a way to live for herself. She was a clever woman; she had kept her forlorn affairs to herself. Not a soul who had admired her gowns, and her air, and her position had any inkling that for the future Tita Marescaux had dropped out. She packed up her clothes, smoothed over her creditors, and started for her visit to the Kilgores, since needs must when the devil of poverty, who makes more sinners than any other devil, drove her. And half-way to the Kilgores, idle curiosity had put salvation into her hands, if she dare grasp it. And she had dared. She sat now in the canoe that was drawing in to Moulton's landing, and exclaimed softly at the man who had run down to meet her:

"Billy!" She knew there was no colour at all in her face, and it angered her. "Didn't you know I was coming?"

"I—I couldn't," said Moulton, stupefied.

She looked younger, more exotic, in her blue flannel and straw hat, than he ever remembered her in trailing gowns and jewels; and he stood dazedly taking stock of her. Surely she had not always been so pale. He came to himself with a guilty start. "I beg your pardon a thousand times," he said. "I could not believe you were real. Let me help you out." He stooped, and swung her up beside him as easily as a child lifts a kitten.

For a moment she stood, drawing her breath slowly; then she spoke with the little laugh he thought he had forgotten.

"It is a long way here, but——" She turned and looked behind her at the tents glinting in the setting sun, the slow, blue smoke rising from the kinty, the pink and yellow marvel of bark Joe called a camp. "How lovely!" she cried—and wondered how Billy could live in such a place. "But it isn't very big, is it? How do we all pack in? And where"—she was as easy as if

she had parted from him yesterday—" are the others?"

"The others!" Moulton turned dumbly, and considered them. Noel, warm and grinning by the canoe; and Joe, absolutely expressionless, beside him. "They're here," said their master; and he said it lamely.

No shadow of his meaning seemed to touch Mrs. Marescaux.

"Then they might have stayed to meet me," she returned smartly, "unless they're all out fishing. He "—she moved her lovely head toward Noel—" said you would be all out fishing. It was about the only thing I could get out of him," and she laughed—up a little scale and down again. "I should like to see Mr. Kilgore fishing. Can't I have some tea?—I'm simply choking! And then you can take me to see him fishing."

"Kilgore!" Moulton exclaimed sharply. "Kilgore!"

Tita turned her soft, grey gaze on him.

"Don't be so reproachful; I didn't mean

to be nasty. Only you know he must look funny in a canoe. Now, Molly——" She seemed suddenly to take in Moulton standing tall beside her, and something in the set of his speechless mouth cut off her laughter like a knife. "What is it?" she cried. "Where are the Kilgores? Is anything wrong?"

"Everything, apparently," said Moulton inwardly, angry and relieved, and furious at being either; outwardly he spoke very gently. "You will think me an absolute idiot, but—I haven't the very vaguest idea what you mean! Did you think the Kilgores were here?"

"Think!" He saw her pupils dilate and flood the wonderful grey of her eyes as she looked at him without breathing. "Why, I came here to stay with them; they said they would send a canoe for me. Aren't they here? Do you mean you're not staying with them? That they didn't send for me?"

Moulton, with the calmness of despair, re-

flected that there could not be a Kilgore house within fifty miles, or he would have heard of it.

"I don't even know them," he said bluntly. "That was my canoe that brought you out. I'm here by myself. That was why I was—— But don't bother about it now. Come and rest, and have some tea; and then we'll talk. You must be worn out, but you needn't be worried."

"Worried!" she repeated; she shut her white lids sharply, so that he saw her long lashes against her cheeks for just long enough to be afraid she was going to cry. "But I must be. You must think me mad—anything!—to have come here like this. They told me—the boy said—he had come for someone, and, of course, I thought it was for me. The—the Welsh man wasn't at home, I couldn't ask him—and I thought the boy knew; at least, I never thought of it at all. It's the 17th, isn't it?" and, as he nodded, she pulled a letter from her pocket.

"Look"—and he could not wonder that her voice shook a little—"look, and you'll see how I got here. The only thing I can't understand is what became of the Kilgores' man. Your boy said this was Lake Teâm."

"It's Little Lake Teâm, yes! But——"

"Oh, then"—the colour flooded her face, but she spoke naturally—"the Kilgores have a house on it as well as you, and you can take me over presently! Read that note. But first do, do give me some tea. You frightened me so that you owe it to me." And there was no doubt about her need of something, as she turned away and sank down wearily on the tumbled moosehide.

Moulton sent Joe flying for tea, but he stood himself precisely where she had left him, and studied the document she had put into his hand. The writing was small, black, and easy to read.

"Beloved Tita:

"We are here, and settled. It is very

beautiful, except the company; the sooner you come and help me with them the better I shall love you. I will send in to Welsh's for you on the 19th, and if you are not there, the man shall wait till you are. On the next page are directions for getting to Welsh's, and after that it is plain sailing. You are, please, to stay with us as long as you can bear it.

"Yours,

"M. KILGORE."

The reader was no longer puzzled as to what had become of the Kilgores. The top of the nine was a little open, but it was a nine for all that; only Tita could ever have made a seven out of it. He went on mechanically with the page of succinct directions.

"Change at Mowatt to narrow-gauge railway, and go on till it stops. Then ask for Carter, who has been told to take you on to Labray's. Sleep there, and they

will take you to Welsh's in the morning. Ask there for the man from Lake Teâm."

It was word for word what he had written to Lane, with one exception. He had carefully put "Little Lake Teâm"; and this lady seemed blandly unconscious that there was any other Lake Teâm than her own. He turned a string of quick questions on Noel, and added the answers to the letter. The Kilgores were, of course, the people who had built a house on the big lake; the idiotic Noel, the officious instrument who had brought an unfortunate lady to the wrong place. He bestowed on the boy a torrent of contempt, which clouded his intellect for the evening.

With a placid grin, Noel handed his master a packet of letters, observing that the white woman had found them at Welsh's. Moulton hardly heard him. He clutched the bundle, and rejoined his guest. Here she was, at seven in the evening, but four

miles from Big Lake Teâm as the crow flies, and thirty in actual distance. It was ten miles to the landing whence she had come, and impossible for any woman to go back to Welsh's for the night. That outlying squatter had neither wife nor child, and the dirt of his abode reeked to heaven.

"You can't go there!" he said aloud.

"Go where?" Her tea had come, and she was thankful for it. "I am going to the Kilgores' the instant you are ready. You didn't think I meant to stay with you, did you?"

"No, I didn't." The reply was relieved, if her ears had been quick enough; and perhaps they were, for she flinched. "But I don't see quite what else you can do—for to-night!" (and where was his rapture, even his pleasure?) "Look, I'll show you how it is."

He spread out the Kilgore girl's letter, and explained what it never dawned on him she had discovered for herself at Welsh's,

when, frantic at finding out her honest mistake in the time of her arrival, she had turned that dirty place inside out in the hope of finding in a pile of letters lying there, something which might show her how to get on to the Kilgores'.

"You see where the trouble is. They're sending for you on the 19th, not to-day. Their house lies like this," drawing a map on the ground, "from here. Take Welsh's for the base of a triangle; the lake on the left of it is Little Lake Teâm, the lake on the right side Big Lake Teâm; the Kilgores' house is there somewhere, I don't quite know."

"Where Welsh lives is the beginning of a neck of land, then?" She took a twig, and followed his plan musingly.

"That stretches up between the two lakes —yes!"

"And, as you've drawn it, his house stands on the widest part?"

"By a couple of miles. It's not more

than four miles across country to the big lake from here. But you'll have to go back to Welsh's to get there."

"That filthy place!" with flat dissent. "Why can't we walk across from here?"

"It's impassable," said Moulton shortly, thankful he knew better than to try to get a woman through that swamp in the dark. "We couldn't get through."

"Impassable!" Tita surveyed gravely what country she could see, and it did not look at all impassable. But, of course, if he said so, it was. Things were coming her way with wonderful celerity; she had not thought it would be so easy to whistle Billy back again. She was suddenly mindful of the packet of letters in his hand. It was lucky she had not been surprised at seeing him; she had almost said she was surprised, at first. But she was quite cool now, and ready. "Then," she looked up, and her unconsciousness was perfect, "what am I to do?"

"I don't know!" returned her host abruptly. "I'll ask Joe."

There was no disguising from herself that the answer was a jar. Six months ago he would have asked no one, have believed heaven had opened if she had been cast on his hospitality, even for an hour. It flashed over her that he was thinking of propriety—propriety, out here!

But he was not. He was thinking of Lane, who might arrive in the morning, and of Lane's unhidden astonishment; and, underneath both, of a dreadful consciousness that he did not like Tita any more, and that he did not want her in his woods. Everything about her jarred, and the reason of its jarring was a mystery; there was no change in Tita. It never occurred to him that there was a great one in himself; or that the Moulton of the woods was not the Moulton of New York. He came back from interviewing Joe, and sat down.

"We'll paddle you down to Welsh's at

daybreak," he said. " I'm sorry, but we can't do any better. You couldn't sleep at Welsh's house, even if he were at home, and it would be too hard on you to try to get you through to-night. You know I would if I could," almost humbly.

" I believe you would," said Tita. A flat horror of disappointment that was too bitter for anger made her face quiver. It was not in this way that she had meant to be received at Moulton's camp; not for this she had seized, as the desperate seize on inspiration, on that bundle of Moulton's letters at Welsh's, on Moulton's man and canoe. He had thought the Kilgore girl's letter an ordinary invitation. Well, she could not explain to him that it had been a rope held to the drowning, nor that she had been glad enough of it till, in the upside-down squalor of Welsh's cabin, she had seen that handful of letters addressed to him. Till that minute she had known no more of his whereabouts than if he had dropped off the earth; to find

that he was within reach of her, meant the chance of a far stronger rope than Molly Kilgore's, to a woman who had her last forty dollars in her pocket. She had cared for one man in the world, and he was not Billy Moulton, nor the defunct Marescaux, but it was not love that could help her in the strait she was in now—or she had not been here. Moulton and Moulton's money might have been hers six months ago, might now, if she knew him; and she thought she did. She looked into his face, and could not tell.

"You'll have to think for me, Billy," she said slowly, "what is really best for me to do." She had called him Billy often enough, but she did it differently now.

There came over the man, with a rush, the same feeling of oppression, of struggling, which had shamed him that morning in the swamp. The woman beside him repelled him, for all her sweetness. He remembered as of someone else, that he had been obsessed with her, mind and body; had

been more or less her slave ever since her widowhood; and now he longed to see her go back to Welsh's. In his discomfort he fumbled at the letters she had brought. There was none from Lane, but that said nothing; Lane would come when he chose. And his duty was plain. He turned to Tita.

"Will you put up with what I have, and stay here? You can have the house, of course. I'll sleep in one of the tents. Then at sunrise I'll take you on to Welsh's, and round to Kilgore's. Lane ought to turn up to-morrow. He and I can paddle you comfortably up the big lake."

"Lane!" It was the only name in all the world that could have made her heart contract in her. "What Lane? Do I know him?"

"Buff Lane! No, I fancy you don't; though most people do."

Tita formed two replies in her head, and used a third.

"Do you mean the Mr. Lane who's supposed to hate women?" Her voice was cold. "The man who's so—amusing?"

"I suppose I do. But you mustn't take him at what people say," he answered quickly; and she flushed as if he had reproved her.

For a moment she sat very still. Buff was coming, might meet her at Welsh's, would know where she had spent the night, Buff, who thought her an angel! If she must go alone to Welsh's now; if she must lose herself in these awful woods and die here, she would not have Buff—her Buff—know to what a shame she had descended. She could see that little glance of his telling her he knew her game—did he not know, to a square, where her pieces stood on the world's chessboard? She flung aside her chance of Moulton, and Moulton's money, as a worthless thing compared with one look from a man who could give her nothing on

God's earth—or she would never have come here.

"I can't stay," she exclaimed; she was suddenly frantic. "Won't you—can't you get me to the Kilgores' to-night? I'm not tired—I'm not, really."

Moulton suddenly liked her better than he had since she came.

"I'm afraid it would be too much for you. And"—he looked at her with frank eyes—"if you're thinking of Lane, Tita, he would be the last man in the world to misunderstand your being here."

Mrs. Marescaux could have screamed at him that it was just because Lane would not misunderstand, that he must never, never know.

"It's not that," she whispered; "I want to go. I can trust you never to speak of the—the wretched mistake—of my coming to you. I don't want anyone else to know; not Mr. Lane," she stuck on the name, "not the Kilgores. Surely you can see for yourself,"

sharply, "that Kilgore is not the man to allow for childish stupidity in a woman like me!"

"Why do you go there?" It came out involuntarily; Kilgore was not a man anyone knew.

For one instant the truth was at her tongue's end; that seeing inevitable ruin hemming her in, day in and day out more imminent at her door, she had been, deliberately, and of calculation, kind to the Kilgore girl, of whom the women fought shy for her looks, and the men for her father's reputation; and that from an apparently chance word had grown adoring gratitude from the girl, and pride in the acquaintance from the father, till now she had but to ask from them and have. But all she said was:

"I like the girl. Besides, the father is not so bad; he can't help the way he made his money. Oh, Billy, can't you get me there to-night? You used to like me—

won't you help me now?" She had forgotten herself till she was desperately natural, and something of his old passion for her woke in his eyes as he answered her:

"It's exactly as you say, Tita. I'll take you."

"No, not you! Send that man; they would know you."

Moulton laughed.

"They never saw me in their lives. You can say I'm a Micmac half-breed if you like, I'm sure I look it! Though, honestly, it wouldn't matter. The woods aren't New York; no one could possibly misunderstand."

"I want to go now!" said Tita; she looked round her, and was smitten afresh with the horror of having Buff know she had ever been here. "Now."

CHAPTER III

IT was a white dawn; pure white.

That was the first thought the Kilgore girl had, as she undid the flap of her tent and slipped out into the world.

Around her was a space thinned of trees and cleared of underbrush, with half a dozen tents pitched in it; tents that were gray against the dull green of a sunless world, mysterious in motionless white mist that was born with the dawn to die with it. Twenty yards aside stood what Kilgore was pleased to call his shack, a long low house verandaed all around, and set so close within living pines that their trunks were within arm-reach of its walls. Molly Kilgore discarded the shack and its floors and bedrooms, for a tent and a bed of hemlock boughs; it made for happiness to watch her canvas roof come white with the day. She stepped softly away from it now, avoided the house, and

came barefoot over the wet green moss to the lake shore. Under the cold, wringing mat of moss, the earth was warm; she wriggled her feet down into it, and stood comforted, looking before her.

There was nothing to see but fold on fold of pearl-white mist; there might have been no lake, but for the clear strip of water that lay visible for two yards or so from the rocky margin, and but that the mist had shores. Every here and there a point of dark woods showed through it, cutting the formless colour that was neither white nor pearl. Over her head the sky was milky, yet translucent, filtering light like a tent of spun glass. By and by it would break. There would come an opal shimmer, a flying rent of blue, a wave of rose and daffodil.

"Oh!" she cried; and hushed herself. The dawn had caught her suddenly; in one heart-beat the pearl mist was opal, pale rose. It split into innumerable whorls, evanescent, mystical, fleeing without wind; and across

the low-lying mass of it came the splendour of living flame, lifting it up, beating it down, bidding it die in glory, since die it must.

The moss at her feet turned from olive to green, the black woods came to colour with a leap; the circling shores nearest her sprang into sight, though straight across the lake the sea of mist still lay pink and pearl and golden. Far out in it she heard a loon call, and dive with the sound half uttered. The cold, unearthly cry startled her as the bird had been startled: she had forgotten the loons. She stood and waited for an answering call, and, not two hundred yards from her, heard it. The long-drawn, mocking melancholy of it rang in the morning. It was not the same bird that had dived, and she waited for the first one, and after a long minute heard it. The second loon laughed.

Something in the sound made the girl lift her head and listen; she could not tell why she listened, but she did; and it came again, a little nearer; after it a soft suck and

gurgle, as if a fish rose far out in the calm water under the blanketing fog. In the north the sky rent suddenly into morning blue, the eastern pink turned orange, the mist flamed as the sun came over the hill; but Molly Kilgore was looking at none of them. Before her, straight out across the lake, the vapour had divided; between breast-high walls of flame and pearl lay a lane of calm water, and coming down it, as the kings of the earth pass between the living walls of a quiet multitude, was a birchbark canoe. The girl stood motionless, staring.

It was none of her own canoes; the morning fishing was let alone at Big Lake Teâm, not a soul in camp was awake but herself and the cook. It was a strange canoe, and a strange Indian paddled bow in it. Her glance flicked to the steering paddle; she had never seen one so lightning quick and silent. She did not know she drew a long, suffocated breath.

A man knelt bolt upright in the stern of

the canoe, bareheaded and bare-throated against the sun. The set of his head and shoulders was like a stag's, as keenly alert, as graceful; his flannel shirt was rolled up over his bare arms, the carved bend of his wrist changed, flattened, and recovered again, like a tempered blade. His face was blade-keen too, spare, dark, clean-shaven; he held his head a little back and sideways, and his eyes——

The sun streamed into the Kilgore girl's eyes and dazzled her, but not till she had seen the man smile. It was not the smile of the men her father knew; it pleased her. And the next instant something like a pang shot through her—though, of course, she had never thought a strange man coming out of the sunrise would be smiling at her. What had seemed a formless heap of rugs amidships of the canoe, had stirred, sat up; a woman's head, bare, black, exquisite, was outlined against the morning sky. It was to her the man was speaking, for her the

keen sweetness of his eyes; and Molly Kilgore would have known the back of that head among a thousand.

"Tita!" she said; she was thunderstruck. She had never known Tita to arrange even the smallest journey for herself. She was not even due till to-morrow; and here she was with a strange man and a canoe, at an hour unheard of—for her! Miss Kilgore never remembered her bare feet, nor her perfunctory toilette. She ran along the shore to the landing-place, moving with swift accuracy from one big stone to the next.

"Tita," she called, poising like a bird on the landing plank. "This way. You can't land where you're going."

Mrs. Marescaux jumped. If it had not been for a quick, inconspicuous movement of the tall man steering, she would have had her cold bath on the instant.

"All right!" she cried. She wished fervently that Molly had had the sense to stay in her bed. As she waved her hand, she leaned

forward with a quick whisper to her *vis-à-vis*. "You'll remember, won't you? You found me at Welsh's—I don't know you—you're——"

Moulton nodded shortly. Having paddled most of the night, not to speak of carrying Tita bodily over every bad place in the neck of land at Welsh's, he would not have been averse to a decent word or two. There was, of course, no sense in confiding in the Kilgores, but he had no opinion of lying to them either.

"Be easy," he said. "Say what you like: I'll stick to it. But if that's Miss Kilgore, she's seen me." He had been conscious merely of a flying, white figure, and a girl's voice calling. He had never cared for girls.

"Billy," the woman whispered, "you know it's best—for now. Say so."

It was just what he did not do. The girl was calling again, in a curious, sweet contralto:

"Swing her to the left; there's a rock before you. Left."

Moulton instinctively obeyed her. When the rock had slipped by he looked up.

She stood on the landing plank, tall, wide-shouldered, and round-waisted. She had on a white flannel shirt thing, and her white skirt was gathered round her in one young hand, as a nymph gathers her draperies. Her waist was girt round with a heavy silk band, and her shirt bagged over it like a boy's. She was barefooted; he could see the rose of her heels, the wet ivory of her insteps as she stood poised, certain, confident, on the narrow gold of the new plank. She was like a white goddess on a golden pedestal, but there was no marble about her. Her face was white and rose and alive; her careless hair burnt gold, her steady eyes dark under the curved hand that shaded them. And, miracle of miracles, she was not thinking of herself at all, but of the oncoming canoe.

"Easy!" she cried; she jerked her head sideways, dropped to her knees, and swayed forward, catching the gunwale. She did not look at the man whose eyes were on her, but at Tita Marescaux, huddled warm and pale in her nest of rugs. "I never expected you," she exclaimed. "I never dreamt of sending for you till to-morrow! How you must have hated me when you got to Welsh's! And where in the world——"

She stopped short. Her eye had caught those wrappings Moulton had piled round his charge: a white rug lined with vicuna, a crimson wadded satin from Japan. They were not Tita's; she knew Tita's possessions by heart; and—they had never been borrowed at Welsh's. She gave one lightning glance at Moulton, and saw his clothes were no better and no worse than the Indian's in the bow of the canoe. His dark face was absolutely without expression, his hand—Molly Kilgore looked no further. She

waited for Tita to introduce him; to begin the tale of how she had come across a man and a canoe and vicuna skins. But Tita did neither.

"Can you get me out?" she asked. "These men want to get back to Welsh's."

"Oh!" said Molly; if Moulton had made the slightest movement, she would have been sure Tita was lying; she was only half sure now. But she did not betray herself. "They'd better have their breakfast, first. The cook's up," she observed practically. She was distrustful enough not to look at the man who held the canoe steady with the stern paddle; the other man was a plain Indian.

"They're in a hurry," returned Tita, as if she were. "How do I get out?"

Moulton said something in Indian. Joe, without a jar of the canoe, was out of her, and had Mrs. Marescaux safely landed and on her feet. She fumbled nervously in her pocket, but she spoke graciously.

"Thank you very much; I am more than obliged to you. Please take it."

"It" was a dollar. It flashed through Miss Kilgore's mind that the hire of two men and a canoe would be five. Moulton wondered sharply if he, too, were to have a dollar for his share in the play; but Tita only nodded to him. "I know you want to get away," she looked straight at him. "Thank you again. Good-bye."

"Tita," expostulated Molly softly, "you don't realise! Out in the woods you can't let men go off hungry; there aren't restaurants and things. At least they must have coffee." She was not quite so simple as she looked, but she was unprepared to have it the Indian who shook his head. The other man was playing with his paddle.

"Plenty breakfast in canoe," Joe observed calmly. "We go now. *Âdiòu!*" and he swung himself in. Miss Kilgore waited for the other man to speak, but he only stuck his

paddle in the water and shoved the canoe bow out.

"Oh, good-bye!" cried Mrs. Marescaux suddenly. She did not want Billy to go off angry: she could not dare offend him.

Moulton laughed, and stopped himself.

"*Âdiou,*" he said, exactly as Joe had said it; he shifted a little, so that he faced the Kilgore girl. "*Âdiou, sagamaskw,*" said he slowly. "*Welâlin. Welaase munna moola wona!*" He never dreamed that she would remember the soft-sounding words.

"What did he say?" asked Tita sharply.

"I don't know," the girl answered indifferently; and immediately began to repeat his words in her mind till she had the sound of them, like a parrot. "For Heaven's sake," she said aloud, "tell me how you got here. Where did you pick up the—canoe?" She had meant to say "the man," but something stopped her. He puzzled her, and she was pretty sure he was no puzzle to Tita. She threw one look at his back, as he paddled

away, and it told no tales; some of the men who had been working on the shack had been as lithely well made, as born to the purple. Yet, whoever he was, he had fitted into the picture of the morning—all but his vicuna skins. She was suddenly a trifle cross. "Come up to the house. The coffee is ready; I smell it," she said curtly, and led the way, up a cleared path this time.

Tita was oddly silent as she followed her. She could not decide whether she had been a fool or a wiseacre. She had been perfectly natural, for once in her life, which abnormal departure frightened her. Every bit of diplomacy she possessed came to her tongue's end, and foolishly; she would have done a hundred times better to trust the other woman.

"Wait for me," she begged softly; "I'm tired. And I'm so horribly afraid I've put you out by coming too soon."

"Oh, you only surprised me," came from ahead, with lightness and no conviction.

"But why didn't you wire? Someone would have brought it through."

"I had no time," her voice caught desperately; "I had to come, Molly. I wanted —sanctuary!"

"Poor Tita!" said the girl softly, as though it were she who was the elder by ten years. She opened the shack door into a big room, and led the way across it to another. "Here's your home; and you have the living room between it and the men's quarters. Sit down, and tell me about things; they are none of them awake."

"There's nothing to tell," drearily; for in common decency she could not air her ghastly poverty to her hostess, even if it were wise. "I was miserable, that's all. So I came. And Welsh's was dreadful; there wasn't even a soul in the house. I couldn't stay there, and I couldn't go back."

Miss Kilgore shut the door into the other room, and faced round.

"Where did you find the man?" she said inexorably.

"The Indians?" Tita's eyes never flickered. "At Welsh's. They were waiting for some Mr. Lane, to take him to some other lake."

"Indians? Oh!" with indescribable softness.

"Well, one was," pettishly. "The other was—was some sort of a half-breed."

"With vicuna rugs," mused Molly. She flashed round on her guest unpardonably: "Did he take *you* in, Tita, by saying he was a half-breed?"

"He didn't say it at all." It was an excellent chance to hedge, and Tita used it. "He never said anything except that he could spare time to bring me here, and that he was going thirty miles in an opposite direction to-morrow." It was as well to remove him at once from the position of a possible neighbour. "And they weren't his rugs, I suppose. I told you he was waiting

for some man. Anyhow, I couldn't stay at Welsh's and—I thought you would be glad to see me!" The tears in her eyes were real. She was tired to death, and more than half sure she had been a fool to leave Moulton's. What could it have mattered if Buff had found her there, and despised her? It would not have affected her daily bread, and he would have to know sometime. The thought made her put a quick hand to her shaking lip.

"Oh, my dear!" cried her hostess penitently; she laid a warm arm round the other woman's shoulders. "I didn't mean to be a brute. You know I don't care who brought you, as long as you came. As for the man, you'd make a coal-heaver show at his best; it's none of my business who he was. I'll go now, and send you coffee, and Anna—I brought Anna; and won't you go to bed till lunch?"

"Who's here?" The hasty question caught her at the door.

"Father and"—Molly hesitated—"and Mr. Squires and Mr. Garnett,—and Reginald Lygon."

"Oh!" said Tita; though she had been prepared for the first two.

"You needn't 'oh!'" wrathfully. "I never asked him; I didn't know father had. I hate him. However, except at meals, he hasn't seen me, thanks to a quick pair of legs. I shan't require to take so much exercise now that you've come," and she laughed, but her eyes were not at all amused.

Mrs. Marescaux breathed a fervent thanksgiving to Providence that Garnett and Squires were not early risers: they would have hailed her half-breed cheerfully by name; but she had done well to trust in the quietest hour of the twenty-four. She always thanked Providence when she felt sure that her own forethought was her benefactor; otherwise, it brought you bad luck to be grateful; and she did it in silence. But as soon as the door was shut she spoke aloud.

" I'm well out of the half-breed business; well!" and she blandly scented the joyful aroma of coffee.

Molly Kilgore, oblivious of time and her toilette, repaired on the double to the back regions and Frank Labrador, the Indian guide. He was not a particularly reputable person, but she had taken a fancy to him.

" Frank," she said, she had a way with her that Mrs. Marescaux would never learn; " what does it mean when you say "—she paused, and got out a sentence phonetically, with infinite pains—" *Ah-de-you, sah-ga-marskwe. Wel-lah-leen. Wel-lay-is munna moola wunna.*"

" That very good Indian," the man answered without surprise; and Tita might not have congratulated herself on an inconspicuous arrival if she had heard him. " That—' Good-bye, my lady. I thank you. But I wish I had never seen you.' "

It was not a full translation; for *welaase* holds more meanings than " I wish." What

Moulton had said was: "To take care of myself I should never have seen you"; but Labrador, in his way, was a gentleman.

"Oh," said Miss Kilgore, "oh! I want you to send down to Welsh's this afternoon for some trunks." She would not seem to set a runner on the heels of any man, and the afternoon would be time enough; Tita could borrow. But she turned thoughtfully away.

"So he *was* a gentleman," she said oracularly, in the seclusion of her tent. "With vicuna skins, and tanned as black as a sweep, and hired at Welsh's for a dollar. I wish," she pulled her hair loose with an angry wrench; "I wish he hadn't dared to speak *at* me. I wish he'd been a common lumberer. I don't like liars—except Tita. I'll put his eyes and his voice and his throat straight out of my mind this minute." And she carried it out by softly imitating the cry of a loon. He had done it beautifully.

CHAPTER IV

"MY foreman said he couldn't build a house here," said Kilgore, chuckling stoutly; "nor get us here, nor our provisions; and I said it was no good being the president of ten lumber companies, and being told you couldn't do as you wanted. So Molly and I just came up here by ourselves, with fifty men. We got the house up in a day. I tell you those men worked for their lives, and—they hadn't any foreman. I wasn't lumbering twenty years on my own hook for nothing; you can't tell me what a man can't do in the woods with an axe and an adze. And it didn't cost so much either; Molly could tell you; she paid the men."

Mr. Reginald Lygon wriggled uneasily; he had heard the history before. Besides, he wanted to talk to Mrs. Marescaux on important subjects, and his host was a fool not

to help him. As slim and handsome and hard an animal as walks this world, he had a mind of his own, and perhaps he used it; but all the thoughts in it were born of his body. He was the crack player of the year at football, golf, and rackets; and if there were men who wondered how he combined that with other things, they did not say so—to women. Just now his thought was to marry Molly Kilgore. He wanted it, her father wanted it, and the only trouble was the devil of silent, smiling evasion, which seemed to possess the girl. Mr. Lygon had imagined it would be easy work to make her care for him, out here in camp, and it had been a jar to find it anything but that. She was perfectly civil, and always occupied. His first idea of sailing in to conquer with flying colours had not been successful. She certainly never refused to go anywhere with him, but he was outgeneralled in the woods, and he promptly realised it. He could not get the hang of paddling himself in a canoe,

and he got lost if he strayed half a mile from the tents.

It was no fun to have a girl walk away from him, and disappear as if into the ground, nor to hear her laugh from ambush while he struggled in thick underbrush for a profane half hour. After two days he abruptly ceased to request her society; and she was oblivious that determination taught him a little more about the woods every hour, and that when he knew all he wanted she would do well to fear him. He was a born still-hunter, and he bided his time; just now in the society of Mrs. Marescaux and Kilgore. And he wished Kilgore would stop boasting he had been a barefoot boy; it was indecent. Why couldn't he go away, and leave Tita in peace? Not that Lygon had any desire to make love to her; he required no practice. His love-making was as thorough, and as scientific, as his skill at games.

"By the way, where is Miss Kilgore?"

he inquired, hoping to set her father fussing; he knew better than to pursue her himself yet.

"She's out," returned Kilgore comfortably. "It beats me the way that girl gets on in the woods. She gets it from me, I suppose. You don't often see a better man than I was—when I had to be! But Molly loves it. I don't see you getting around with her much, Lygon."

"She's too good for me," said Lygon simply; he seldom lied. "But it occurred to me that she was gone a good while."

"She'll come back," easily. "Hi, Squires," as a stout man appeared up the path from the lake, "couldn't think where you'd got to. What do you think about a little formality? Seems to me just about a good time."

Mr. Squires paused, portly and amiable. "Well," he mopped his brow and fanned himself. "I don't know that it isn't. I've been trying to catch a turtle for the ladies.

I'd no idea, now, that a turtle was such a handsome animal—but he didn't seem to think the same of me. I've been on the push in that flatboat for an hour," his small eyes twinkled; " and Garnett can swim."

" How do you know? " Kilgore and Mrs. Marescaux were simultaneous. Garnett had never been known to do anything but exist beautifully in immaculate clothes.

" Left him swimming," calmly. " Frank and the cook are getting him out now. I did think it was rather deep for turtles, but I tried it, and so did Garnett, and his yellow French book, and his umbrella. And, as you're so pressing, Kilgore, I'll join you in a cocktail. It's good for you in the open air, and after anxiety, Mrs. Marescaux."

" Great Scott, Squires! " said Kilgore angrily; " you might have drowned the man. You'll get no drink from me till I see him. Come on."

Mrs. Marescaux lifted pregnant eyes to Lygon as the two fat, incongruous figures

departed arm in arm over the green moss and broken fern.

"I should think Mr. Garnett was the last man to like practical jokes. He's so manicured," she said idly. "How on earth does he stand Mr. Squires?"

"My dear girl, they're pals." Lygon alone with a woman was a different man from Lygon in general society. "Go everywhere together. I hate them both myself." Tita laughed.

"Do you know, I like Mr. Squires? He told me once his idea of hell was that he would be shut up in a cheap hotel bedroom with the furnace gone out. You know immediately what a man is when you get his ideas on hell."

"I dare say." Lygon yawned without apology. "Don't believe in it myself."

"You will before you die," with the malice of conviction; her nose wrinkled deliciously as she laughed into his face. "I don't believe it's any good, Rex. You'd

better give up the chase, and amuse yourself by making love to me."

The man's hard, fine-grained cheek flushed. The many women who had cared for him had been apt to forget that his brown-pink colouring and long eyelashes did not move his hard eyes any wider apart.

"You never can tell from where you sit, Tita," he said disagreeably. "I'll play my own game, if you please, and I don't mean to make love to you while I'm at it. A man needs to be clever, for you. You don't care for things. I don't suppose you ever sat out a football match in your life."

"You — dear — simple — boy," drawled Mrs. Marescaux. He was quite aware that she was absolutely lovely and as absolutely out of place at Kilgore's, and he had a sudden sharp appreciation that she would be a poor friend, perhaps, but a good enemy. "Athletics, and a girl. Just one girl! I see."

"It's all you need see, Tita." There was no one about, and in the dappled sun and shade of the half-cleared camp he could put all the softness of his voice into her Christian name. "I mean it this time. I want to marry her."

"Papa Kilgore has a lit—tle money," she said, unimpressed.

"Well, I can't marry a girl without any, perhaps." He stood up, and looked down straight into her upturned eyes, "But it's got very little to do with it. You know I never say I love people; as a rule I don't; this time I do. Are you going to tell her things? Or are you going to be square? for old times' sake?"

"'So he buried her for old times' sake,'" quoted Mrs. Marescaux thoughtfully; "I'll see! I—will—see. There is nothing in old times or new, my ingenuous youth, that you can adjure me by, and," coolly, "I think you know it. Here"—she stripped the intimacy from her voice as she would have taken off a

glove—" here come the port and stoutlies, Mr. Lygon," as Kilgore and Squires turned the corner. " I always think of them as that. So much more expressive, you know, than the stout and portly."

Lygon stared thoughtfully at her lovely back as she swept past to join them. She was evidently not going to help him, and he had not liked the tone of her voice. He wished heartily that he had known something out of the old times to which he had darkly alluded, but the only fact he could get at was that he had once kissed her hand, and she had laughed at him. She had always been a circumspect woman, living her life in a crowd. But her snub had put a little more fuel on the flame of his purpose. He had come out to this boring hole to get engaged to the Kilgore girl, and he meant to do it. He had always relied on himself, and he was glad of it, if this was the way confidants treated a man. He stretched himself blandly as an idea grew in his head, and then rose

impatiently. Ideas were all very well, but where had Miss Kilgore got to? It was nearly seven, and she had not come home.

The vexation went from his face as if it had been wiped off with a sponge. She was coming at that very instant, walking placidly from her tent, immaculate in a fresh white gown, with the golden green of the sinking sun filtering through the trees on her bronze-gold head as she moved towards him. Since Tita would not help him, he would strike for himself; now, while the iron was hot, and he had the chance. He was perfectly conscious that the girl avoided him because she knew he meant to marry her; the first thing to do was to have a talk with her, and insinuate that that dream was ended, and he was ready to be content with the merest crumbs of friendship, flung unmissed, like yesterday's rolls to the sparrows. When she was at her ease with him —he would see! There were not many

women with whom he could not find the way, if he tried. And any way, hook, crook, or straight, would do, that brought him one inch nearer to Molly Kilgore. To do him justice, he forgot Kilgore's money, for she had sat down quite close to him, a thing she had never done before; he forgot she had never had Tita there before, either.

"It's like heaven, isn't it?" he observed unexpectedly; and he meant it, though not about the lake and the sunset and the faint new moon.

"Yes," said Molly baldly; she was startled, because she had never heard Lygon's voice with just that ring in it. And he had the sense not to look at her, but out across the water, dreamily. If Mrs. Marescaux had not been busy, she would have noticed him, and promptly cut off his dream; but she was amusing Kilgore. It was necessary to do something for her board and lodging.

"You see," Lygon began carefully, "I didn't like it at first. It's so big, somehow;

it made me feel small. But now I begin to know, dimly, how you feel about it."

"I didn't think you'd ever like it," said Molly frankly. "I thought you were unutterably bored. There's so little to do, if you're not like father—tired."

"Suppose I am," quietly; he had never been tired in his life, except of people who were too faithful. "A man gets into a groove, and can't get out of it—but he may see how contemptible it is, all the same. This sort of thing makes you—different!"

Molly nodded, with a guilty feeling that she had wronged him. After all, what had she against him but a kind of stupid repulsion, founded on—she supposed it was something about his manner, the way he looked at her; for, as he was to-night, it had almost vanished.

"Miss Kilgore," he said suddenly, "I wish you and I could be friends! Do you know I don't think I ever had a friend in my life? Of course, I've always been more

or less of an idiot, but I've a kind of—of stupid shyness. I know people don't like me, and then for my life I can't help doing the things they don't like just a little harder. But—I'm getting that rot knocked out of me, out here!"

Miss Kilgore froze up on the instant.

"There, you see," said Lygon lightly, "I make you dislike me again." There was no lightness on his face. "I didn't mean a boring sort of friendship, that makes a man a nuisance; I meant—oh, well, look at Squires! You talk to him happily—and let me tell you, he's a mighty different man talking to you, from what he is in town. Couldn't you pretend I was only Squires, and give me a chance, too? I'm not amusing, and I'm not particularly popular—but the Lord knows I'm lonely." There was a quick, hard drop to his voice. He got up.

"Don't go," said Molly swiftly. "You've begun to speak out, let me go on. I've been

afraid of you, I don't know why. I've kept out of your way," faintly, " a little."

" I'm not worth that." His eyes met hers, very straight and full. "I've been unpardonable in inflicting myself on you, often; but I shan't be any more; it—it's rather ghastly to have a girl say she has been afraid of you! Please don't stop me, Miss Kilgore. I won't worry you like this again, but I can't help knowing why you were afraid, and on my honour I will never trouble you with any more of that idiotic presumption. I—I couldn't, any more than I could "—he looked about him for an example that would be salient, everyday, convincing; and found it, in Frank Labrador, amusing himself in a canoe with effortless strength and skill. He pointed to him—" any more than I could do that; and, as you know, I'm a fool in a canoe. I've learned things out here, and one is "—he stopped abruptly—" well, you know what it is! I think I was an out-and-out brute when I came. I'm pretty bad yet,

but you needn't avoid me. Will you believe in me a little?" He stood beside her, hard, good-looking, quiet, exactly the man a girl might have misjudged; and Molly Kilgore looked at the ground shamefacedly.

She always made up her mind about people too fast; and it was true she had never given Lygon a chance, just because she had not liked his manner, nor some gossip that had reached her about him. She glanced at his averted face.

"I've been horrid," she said simply. "But——"

"You never were horrid." Mr. Lygon did not want any explanations; they were never safe, after a certain point. "I deserved it. But I won't any more. So that's a bargain." And, for the first time, he looked at her, as one man may look frankly at another, and as he had never done to his own sex in his life. "I promise you, Miss Kilgore, that I"—at the step behind him he changed the end of his sentence sharply—

"that I shall always be a useless idiot in a canoe."

"What?" said Squires; he had come out of the house, spotless in fresh white ducks. "Dinner's ready! Where did you say you were a useless idiot, Lygon?"

"In a canoe! I shall never be able to paddle, if I slave at it till I'm a hundred. And it's a lazy place out here. I've given up trying to do that, or anything else, that's beyond me!"

He stood back to let his hostess pass.

CHAPTER V

MOLLY KILGORE sat in the morning sunlight, and was conscious that her world was out of joint.

There was, to begin with, something the matter with Tita. It was not like Tita to make mysteries with her; and there was mystery in the air. Also she knew with shame that when the man whom Tita had called a half-breed (and been silent about ever since) had come smiling out of the sunrise, she had felt as she had never felt before. She had never heard a voice like his, nor met a glance that so disturbed her quick blood. When he had gone the lake seemed lonely, the woods grim. The very look of him had given her the woman's knowledge that with him she would never be afraid of anything in all her life. And this June day she was afraid—of nothing, and less than nothing.

The night before, she had informed Tita

of her conversation with Lygon, and his beautiful and reformed sentiments; and Tita had grinned. If he had forgotten his earlier confidences of the afternoon, the confidant had not; and she said so. She had an honest desire to circumvent Mr. Lygon; he was not fit to tie Molly's shoe.

And Molly had said absolutely nothing. The " half-breed " had rankled; Lygon's retailed confidence might be of a piece with that. But now, out in the sunlight, she knew better. Ten minutes ago a chance sight of him had shown her the trust to be put in some of his words; and instinct told her the rest were like them, when she happened on a secluded cove, and on Mr. Lygon in a canoe.

A week ago he could not steer the simplest course; now he sent the birchbark flying in figures of eight, crowded her to full speed, stopped her all quivering. And the strength of him, the silent accomplishment, sent the blood from the girl's heart. He had not

seen her. She dropped to her hands and knees, and crawled swiftly away.

He had lied about his paddling. And Tita was right; he had lied about everything else, and she had been a fool to believe him. It was only a cleverer method of getting at the same thing, and a more dangerous one. He could paddle now, if not as well as she, at least with double the speed; there would be no more walking away from him in her canoe. And in another week he would be able to find his way in the woods, and there would be no more taking him out and losing him. This morning was a sample of what he could do if he put his heart into it; and it was, to a girl who disliked him, an ugly sight. She plumped into a thicket of sweet fern, and lay there to consider things.

Kilgore was a man who could not be contradicted openly; to oppose him was never wise. She knew why Lygon had been asked to camp; knew that to let him go about with her, and then refuse him, would be to rouse

every rough and domineering instinct in her father. Her only safety was to make it look as though Lygon did not care to be with her.

"If father weren't 'self-made,'" she thought wretchedly, "and if he didn't think Mr. Lygon grand, I could do something, even if it were only to find someone a little grander. But father never knew any of the men he wanted to in New York, till he met Mr. Lygon. He'd be beaming if only I were Mrs. Reginald Lygon, with my name in the papers with the rest of the Lygons: he knows people turn up their noses at Molly Kilgore. Poor father!" she laughed, not too steadily. "He can't see why I don't like Mr. Lygon. I know, and I don't know how I know, for I never heard much about him, that he's a beast"—passionately—"just a beast! And if I refuse him, father will be raging. In another two days I won't be able to keep out of his way, unless I stick to the shack and never leave Tita. I've got to do something. If nothing happens, father won't blame me;

he isn't like a made-up father in a book, who'd tell Lygon he could have me. I know as well as I know my prayers, that he's told him he must settle it with me. And there'll be only one way—to father. I've got to do something. Only I don't——" She sat up stiffly, with the sudden thought that came to her.

"The swamp—where I was yesterday! The swamp! He's afraid of it; he was with father the day he got bogged; he's heard all Frank's horrors about it. I heard him say, and he wasn't lying, that he wouldn't take a thousand dollars to cross it. And after yesterday, with a little patience, and some red ribbon, I'm not afraid of any swamp. There must be nice places on the other side, and no one would ever think of it."

No one, indeed. The subject came up at lunch, and even the cynical Garnett listened credulously to Kilgore's casual acceptance of the impossibility of the place. Lygon, without the vaguest idea that Tita had put into

his head the ancient thought of absence (with another lady!) making the female heart grow fonder, put himself out of the way by inviting her to go fishing. Mr. Kilgore and his friends sought slumber; and Mr. Kilgore's daughter, the forbidden ground.

She had learned a little about it yesterday, with more excitement and uncertainty about her ultimate return than she had quite cared about, but there was more at stake to-day than being late for dinner.

By three o'clock she had disappeared as if she had gone into the ground, dressed in her shortest skirt, and with a shopful of lengths of red ribbon in her pocket. There was a dead-fall where she went into the swamp, and no marking that with red ribbon, but, when she had passed, there stood a bush of flaming kalmia where kalmia never grew. It would take more than a town-bred Lygon to think of that. She slipped through a sheltering thicket of alders, and

tied her rose-red token boldly on the other side of it. She knew where to get out now; it was reassuring, after yesterday when she had not known it. And then she began to thread her way.

Half a mile of it, with stops to mark out her track so that it was visible in the swamp only, and not from any commanding hillside, cost her wet feet and a plunging heart; but she went slowly on. If she had a wild longing to run—no matter where, so that she ran out of the swamp—she killed it; she was even bold enough to think the thoughts that formed themselves in her brain. It was all very well to laugh at Frank's tales about the swamp; it was another thing to be alone in it, making your way painfully along narrow, winding aisles of moss between runlets of bottomless black water, never daring to take your eyes off the last ribbon before you tied on a new one—to make sure the way back was clear to you, and not as it had been to Ben Christmas and

the Frenchwoman's son, when all the time you had a feeling of uncanny companionship —of a whisper at your very shoulder, even while you turned to see that there was nothing there. Kilgore's daughter had a natural aptitude for the wilderness, and she was sturdy flesh and blood, else, perhaps even the thought of Lygon and the marriage she would not make would not have driven her through the haunted place like a hunted doe.

She was really not long at it; if she had known it, Frank Labrador, without the ribbons, and with no idea of ever crossing back again, had been longer; yet it seemed more by far than two hours, when her feet felt solid ground. She tied the biggest ribbon she had left on a tree in triumph, and ran up the first rise of a low hill. She was over the swamp. It was with no affectation that she stretched herself on the clean pine droppings to rest; more than her body had felt the strain.

"But I'm over!" she thought happily.

"And, judging from the way I felt, nobody else will ever try it. There's no one to see my ribbons from this side, and no ribbons to see from the other. I can come and go whenever I like, and in a day or two it will be easy."

She had almost forgotten that curious threatening of evil in the swamp, of silent feet other than her own, that walked beside her; and remembering it, remembered something else; and God knows from what cave-woman the thought came to her. She took the only gold thing she wore, and flung it as far as she could throw into the swamp. It was ransom—oblation—anything you like; she said to herself that it was extremely foolish—and very wise! Then she looked about her and laughed. The hillside could not have been prettier if it had been made for her.

Behind her were high rocks, pine-shadowed, fern-grown; some of them were massed together to make a half-circle of

plain ground before them, and at one side of it there ran down a small brook, very clear, very dancing. She got up, and explored a little. There was an overhanging stone that sheltered the very place to leave a tea-kettle; day after day she could come here and cook what meal she pleased, could bring a book and read, or wade in the brook, or follow it up the hill through the sunshine, over the long green mosses and the rock fern. She began to sing to herself very softly; it had come to her suddenly that in all her life before she had never known what it was to be free, and happy.

Somebody else, not two hundred yards off, was thinking that he was neither. Things were not going well with Billy Moulton. He said to himself that it was, first and foremost, getting that letter from Lane, saying that he was laid up, and the date of his arrival more than uncertain; second, that Joe had sprained his leg and was useless a yard from the camp; and third, that he had

lost his best flybook the evening before. But he knew all the time that the reason he sat on the hillside and chewed his empty pipe was that he had behaved like a fool because Tita Marescaux had ordered him to.

"If I hadn't sat there and pretended to be a half-breed, and called out things in Indian that I didn't mean, I might be over at Kilgore's, saying things in English that I did," he burst out finally. He had put out of his mind that Kilgore was purse-proud and pushing, and some of his lumber transactions more than sharp practice; the man must be better than his reputation to have such a daughter. And then he swore at himself. It was not for a piece of beautiful white and gold girlhood, with common sense and a gallant way of bearing herself thrown in, that he should have wanted to go to Kilgore's; it ought to have been for Tita. And he was more than ever conscious that out of Tita's sight, he never thought of her at all; and that with her, he felt her jar on

him. The girl had been all of a piece with the dawn and the lake; he supposed some man, luckier than he, would one day tell her so. Not, of course, that he wanted to talk to her like that; only she had had the look of a comrade—of careless boyish give-and-take that would last in rough weather or smooth.

It smote him with a sense of injustice that he could never make a friend of that girl. In all decency he was bound to Tita and Tita's way of life; dinners, and dances, and operas, all things he liked in their season, but not for the whole long year round. He had sometimes thought there must be somewhere in the world a woman who would love the woods as he did; who would learn to fish, and follow a trail, and sleep at night under the stars. And he knew that none of these things could he teach Tita. He had seen her so clearly at his own camp, the day she came to him by mistake. What glamour had come on him, in the paddle down Little Lake Teâm, over the long portage where he

carried her in his arms like a child? It was the old primal instinct that had undone him —the dark reminder of a time when one night under one set of stars with one woman had meant just that and no more. It was nothing supersensual that had made him ask Tita Marescaux to marry him; he had nothing to plume himself on. The thing was done, and he had done it. All that remained was her answer; she had not really given him that. But he was perfectly aware what it would be. And—he informed himself sharply that Tita was a sweet little lady, and if she could not answer to all the longing for a wild life that was bred in and in to him, it could not be expected of her. Men's wives, he knew—with a knowledge he would have been better without—seldom did care for the things their husbands had at heart.

He crammed his dead pipe into his pocket, and strolled aimlessly down the hill; it was blackguardly to sit thinking that Tita's yes or no to him would mean prison or liberty,

in the direct opposite of his thought of it three months ago. If she said "yes," there was nothing for him but to hope to God that he would forget, in the town, how she had looked to him in the real world, where love was love, and not a phantom born of lights falling softly on the prettiest woman in the smartest gown in the room.

He had on moccasins, and from unconscious habit went softly over the broken ground; and suddenly, and without noise, he jerked up at attention. Every memory of Tita Marescaux went straight out of his head.

Down below him, kneeling in a half-circle of rocks, was the Kilgore girl. She was singing a little tune with a softness that was yet rich and full; and, as she sang, she built a fire. Moulton, turned to stone, watched the bend of her bronze-gold head, and the cleverness of her fingers; and suddenly fairly bounced with a thought that came to him. She was splashed with dark mud from shoul-

der to heel; she had come over the swamp, and—she would have to go back again! He remembered his own efforts to cross, and stood appalled. He had made one step to go to her and tell her not to attempt it, when he remembered. He was a half-breed, and would frighten her; or he must give Tita away. Mr. Moulton sat dumfounded in an inconspicuous position, and waited for what was going to be allowed to happen. At least, she should not go like Ben Christmas and the Frenchwoman's son; he had main strength enough to prevent that.

From where he sat he could not see her, and by-and-by he wondered why she had stopped singing. He leaned forward cautiously; got up without any care at all, and stared. She was gone, with her well-built fire unlighted. He turned and ran, up the broken ground to the highest rock he knew, as he had never run on the cinder path, and he had been a good man there in his day.

CHAPTER VI

IT is a curious fact that a girl known for no time whatever can shake a man's faith in the friend he has trusted from his youth.

Moulton, glaring from the hillside, waiting to see Molly Kilgore founder in the bog as he had foundered, as, according to Joe, all human beings must, had any belief in that gentleman swept away from him. He had mounted his rock to mark just where the girl stuck, and race down to help her, but it appeared that he might as well have stayed where he was.

A plain mark in her white gown, she was moving forward slowly, and very deviously, but always, nevertheless, in the direction of her own camp. For one instant, Moulton was sure he ought still to follow her; she might be bogged a mile off as easily as a hundred yards. But remembering his own

progress in the swamp, he stood still. She was making far better weather than he had done; he might frighten her if he plunged after her, perhaps make her lose her head. Yet he would not have another comfortable moment when once she was out of his sight. And it was not till then that he remembered his field-glass. He had brought it out to study the way of an eagle in the air, and it did not dawn on him that quite as inexplicable, and nearer home, was the way of a man with a maid. He whipped out the glass, and caught the moving white girl.

He had no idea how much time had flown when at last he dropped his hand with a satisfied sigh; he had seen his speck of white vanish into the thick brushwood of the rising ground on the Kilgore side of the swamp, and that was all. Then he realised that his eyes were tired, and felt furious that he had let Joe take him in with a hobgoblin theory about the swamp. It was all fudge. If a girl could come and go across it, anybody

could. He returned to his own camp on the double, hot-foot to convict Joe of idiotic superstition; and, when he got there, did nothing of the kind. Instead, he held his tongue, for his own reasons, which would no longer hold after he had triumphantly crossed and recrossed the swamp for himself. He set out for it at ten the next morning. It did not dawn on him to go in where the girl had gone in; her red ribbons had been too carefully placed to be visible from the hillside, and he saw no sign of anything to guide him, even if he had thought of it. What a girl could do, he could. He did not even notice particularly that the sun began to cloud over as he went in.

At three in the afternoon, Molly Kilgore, having got rid of Lygon with an ease that ought to have made her suspicious, came to a dead halt when she flitted from one red ribbon to another. If the swamp had been uncanny yesterday in the bright sun, it was terrifying under the dull grey sky to-day.

Half a dozen times already she had stood still and heard her own heart plunge, but this was different. There was something moving behind the next clump of bushes, and not that intangible something—sprung of God knows what—that she had feared all day yesterday at her elbow. This thing was alive—human.

"Lygon!" she thought. She could hardly dare slip softly, as an otter slips, to the screen of bushes, and peer through.

What she saw sent her fear flying, and set her to laughing wickedly. All that she had wondered, and been angry about, on that unforgotten morning by the lake shore, she could know now—if she wanted to. And she thought—perhaps—she did! It would serve Tita right to be scored off for her come-by-chance Indians, who lived thirty miles off, and the rest of her soft little fabrications. For, ten yards away, Tita's half-breed sat on a quaking tussock; and the cleverest woman in the world could

not have guessed at his station from his clothes. Not a stitch of them was visible through their coating of swamp mud. His blade-keen face had a whimsical look, and yet he seemed to be sitting with the immobility of exhaustion. As she stood astounded, he began to whistle through his teeth; took a cigarette from a gunmetal case, and tried to light it. The matches, which had been loose in his pocket, were useless; he threw them down one by one. If he had known Molly Kilgore was there, he might not have spoken aloud in the ordinary English of a gentleman.

"So much for my rank conceit of myself!" he observed, without much of it left. "I'll take another cast. It dawns on me that I'm pretty efficiently bogged, without any of Joe's spooks." He bit on his unlit cigarette, and rose, with some trouble, to his feet. He was on bad ground; he did not need it to shake under him. He began to move slowly to his right.

"Oh, my goodness!" thought Molly Kilgore, with sudden knowledge. No matter who he was, nor how he had chosen to masquerade to her, she could not see him drown by inches in choking, bubbling black mud. He was making for the very worst hole in the swamp, and, once he was in it, there could only be the end. She could never help him, even if he could tell her what to do. She wrenched the bushes away from her face, and called to him:

"Wait! You can't go that way. I tried it yesterday. Oh, wait!" In her horror, her voice came in a thick whisper that did not carry, and Moulton made another step forward. This time she shrieked to him with all her lungs, and the sharp ring of it brought him up standing.

"Keep still!" she cried; and he turned his head, and saw her, up to her waist in swamp maple, parting the tough boughs before her face.

Her hair was like a flame of gold against

the dull greenness, and he realised stupidly that she was all white. She had been rose that morning in the dawn. Instinctively he put his hand to his cap, which was not there; and, as he stood, his feet sank to the ankles, with a sucking sound that was loud in the quiet.

"You're going the wrong way," called Molly. She did her best to be casual; if he took two more wrong steps she could never get him out. "Can you come back to me, just as you went? It's quite safe where I am."

She had not known she could quiver as she quivered while she watched him, though of course, it had nothing to do with the man himself; she could not have borne to have seen any living creature drown in that wicked swamp. It made her sick to hear the suck of the ground, as he came slowly back to her. When he was at the maple scrub, and through it, she held fast to an outlying bough. She had been just in time.

"What possessed you to try the place?" she asked him sharply, as if it were her business to blame him.

"I thought it was easy." He told the truth as he would have told it to Joe. "I saw you do it yesterday." He threw his chewed cigarette behind the screen of maples, and looked at her. There was no mud on her to-day, except on her shoes, and the colour had come back to her face.

"I've worked it out." She was suddenly mindful that he had pretended to be an Indian, that if he lived thirty miles off he must be hanging about here for his own ends, and that on a morning he had deliberately spoken no English before her, so that Tita might have a free hand when she said he was a half-breed. She turned on him icily. "You can speak Indian. Why didn't they tell you this place wasn't safe?"

"They did." But he did not lower his eyes. "I believed it till I saw you come and go as if it were nothing. I owe you very

much for calling to me. I didn't deserve it; but if you hadn't, I might have thrashed about in this place all night."

"Like Ben Christmas!" she remarked drily. It was her opinion that she had saved his life; he might have said more about it.

"Or the Frenchwoman's son. Ugh! I tried not to think about them," said Moulton. He could not help it; his old horror of the swamp was back on him.

"How do you know about them?" She was surprised out of herself.

"I'm half Indian," he said simply. "At least, I'm white enough, but I was brought up in camps with Indians; which makes this afternoon all the worse. I ought to have had instinct enough to get through."

"There's no sun," said Molly, with sudden relenting. If he had really been brought up like that, he had not been acting such a lie; and if he had told it to Tita, she would have immediately thought him a half-breed. She began to feel a lively curiosity about

him. She reflected inconsequently that she did not know another man who could look presentable when he was coated head to heels in black mud. "Where do you want to go?" she inquired craftily.

"Over there," he pointed, "where you went yesterday. I was sitting there when I saw you. I've a camp a couple of miles away from that."

The girl wished she were sure Tita knew that. If she did, she had meant to keep her half-breed to herself, and perhaps he had meant it, too. The finding of him suddenly ceased to please her.

"I'll show you the way," she said rather stiffly. She did not want to go even within two miles of his camp, she would not let herself think why. If he had not been so foolhardily lost, she might have merely told him to look out for red ribbons, and let him manage for himself. But it would be too inhuman. "I marked a path yesterday. I did it," hastily, "for reasons of my own; I

don't want it spoken about. Though, of course," she had seen him flush angrily, "I don't mean you would be likely to——"

"To talk about it? No," he replied rather huffily. "If you would rather not show me, I can manage perfectly. At least," for fear she took him at the lie and went out of his sight, "I'd try it."

"I wouldn't have called to you if I'd thought you could manage," she answered coolly. "Will you come after me? These," she pointed to a rose-red ribbon tied to a bush, "are my marks. But it's pretty boggy between some of them!"

"Pretty boggy" was mild. He watched her flit before him from bad places to worse ones, and stand on good ground where one red ribbon after another flamed in the dull grey and green of the day. The heat was damply insistent, but there was no rain in the sky. He kept wondering, as he followed her, what reason in the world had brought her to

this hellish quicksand; and suddenly she paused and answered to the thought, though it was from reasons of her own.

"You're a man; you ought to have better nerves than a woman. Tell me, do you feel a queer sort of horror in this swamp? I don't mean so much going this way, as the other. There's a tangible sort of—of dread —I don't know whether you understand me. Do you think a man would feel it?" Her mind had run back uneasily to Lygon, and the chances against his following her.

"I feel it," said Moulton ignorantly; he was not ashamed of it to-day. "Something keeps telling you to run." It was not all he could have said, but it was enough, standing where they stood. "I don't think you ought to come here," he added hastily and severely, though it was no business of his.

Molly frowned.

"I wanted to get the better of it. I had another reason, but—that doesn't matter!

Besides, I don't feel so much afraid of it to-day; I gave it the most precious thing I had yesterday," and she laughed, remembering that foolish fling of her only gold ornament.

"What do you mean?" He was so taken aback that he was stern.

"My gold bangle." She stared a little at his tone. "If you do that, it lets you pass —but, of course, it's only Indian nonsense! Just as it is that you mustn't pick a flower."

"Why not?"

"Because," she had not liked his voice, it sounded as though he despised her childishness, and she looked at him deliberately, "if you do, you will give the swamp the most precious thing you have, and not of your own will, either. And it's generally——"

"What?"

"You can ask your Indians; they believe in it." She had no idea of telling him what

he knew already. "Being half-Indian yourself they will tell you—they wouldn't a white man."

"Oh, Lord!" thought Moulton. "This is getting it in the neck." He took a step back from her. "Will you let me explain myself, or not?" he asked gravely. "It is for you to say."

"I have nothing to do with it," said Miss Kilgore chillingly. "It does not matter to me particularly who you are. I am glad," not without malice, "to have been able to show you the way out of a mud-hole."

"You saved my life," said Moulton, perilously near to losing his temper. "I will tell you that much, even if you don't care to hear it. My only Indian is laid up with a bad leg, and can't leave camp; I might have knocked round that swamp for days; and I'm going to introduce myself on the strength of it, whether it interests you or not. My name's Moulton. And I came by

chance on Mrs. Marescaux in trouble, and paddled her up to your house."

"And spoke in Indian!" she finished calmly. His name meant nothing to her, except that she had sometimes seen it in the papers.

"And made an ass of myself," he assented. "To be honest," the turn of the phrase did not appeal to him, but it was out, "I didn't want to have any neighbours in this place; I was angry when I heard you had built a house on the other lake. But that was before—that was—" hastily, "when I was in—when I did not know." He floundered to a halt, but he felt better all the same. It was out now; he could go to call at the Kilgores' as a decent neighbour should, and meet—meet Tita! The thought came like a bullet. He would have to pretend to fall slowly in love with Tita, before this girl. He choked down a word that was on his tongue. He would rather have been left to flounder in this swamp forever, than

go to Molly Kilgore's house bound in all honour to another woman, and a woman he did not love, nor ever would love as a man loves his mate, nor even his friend. "I can only beg of you a thousand pardons," he said lamely, and shortly enough, "and thank you for to-day. If you like coming here," they were all but on his land now, "don't let the thought disturb you that I shall worry you. I can't expect you to care to be friendly with me. I "—and it was not at all what he meant to say, but it came out—"I picked a flower in that swamp."

If she heard, she took no notice.

"Here's where you land!" she said.

"Yes," said Moulton, the ornament of ballrooms; it was the only thing that occurred to him, if it was not brilliant, and instead of looking thankfully at the good, clean hillside before him, his eyes turned to Molly Kilgore. For some silly and inexplicable reason, the two stood silent, gazing at each other stupidly, as a man and woman

gaze who have known each other for years, who cannot understand they have to part. And the man's eyes had in them a depth of darkness that was yet light, a look that Tita Marescaux had never seen there, a look that does not die for one woman while the world lasts.

Molly Kilgore's heart leaped in her like that of a queen who comes to her own. The world was suddenly very young—the sky and the trees and the wind off the hillside. Lygon was an ugly dream; Mrs. Marescaux, for all either remembered her, might have been dead and buried.

Moulton's head went up and sideways with the gesture Molly had loved the first day she saw it; his keen face was sweet, oddly boyish.

"Miss Kilgore," he said, "don't you think you and I—we—might make some tea? I'm hungry; and I've a kettle and my lunch that I haven't had over there by the rocks. Would you?" His voice was all

at once the voice of a comrade, but in it, too, was a queer reverence that the girl's instinct knew for what it was.

"I think," she said very slowly, "that I'm hungry, too."

CHAPTER VII

MISS KILGORE stole out of her tent in the early morning, and vanished into the swamp, with the air of a person who has finally made up her mind.

For a week she had stayed at home, and hugged the society of Tita; and it was not to be done any longer. Mr. Lygon's proffered friendship had turned out just as Tita said it would; the man's manner and look wore on her, and a certain something about his being always at her heels was getting to be taken for granted. There were things, too, half said and half implied, that made her hate and fear him; and the contemptuous wonder on Mr. Garnett's face, as he looked on at the game, was infuriating, and meeting Moulton in the swamp had put that refuge out of the question. No girl, who had made a clear trail leading to

any man's haunts, could spend her days on it; though it might be nonsense to suppose he ever went there, there was always the chance. And she would not set herself in the way of any man, especially Tita's half-breed. She must make a hiding-place for herself, if she were to use the swamp as she meant to use it.

"If Mr. Lygon's the devil, Mr. Moulton is the deep sea, and I'm between them!" she thought, hurrying over the trail she had not trodden since the day she had sat by Moulton's spring, and drunk his tea, and been absolutely happy. "But if I can find a place for myself, not on his land, there isn't any reason I shouldn't go there! I've got to go somewhere, and the swamp ought to be big enough. Oh, if only——" But she did not finish. Tita's half-breed was no business of hers.

She struck off from the ribboned track diagonally, and then back a little, toward her own camp. She had not listened to Frank

Labrador on the subject of the swamp for nothing, and if what he said were true, she could evade Lygon without running on Moulton's heels. She went up and down, not too hopefully—Frank had a way of rounding up his stories with a shrug, and a "p'raps. We don' know," that was not reassuring—and suddenly brought up standing. She had found the place. And it would take more than a Lygon to find it, or even a gentleman brought up like a half-breed.

She had broken through a thicket of tough bushes, and come out on the only rocky bit in the whole swamp. Surrounded by an impervious screen of bushes was a flat place, piled with boulders, and in the midst of them was water; and not the water of the rest of the swamp, but the hard, white sparkle of a very deep spring. It bubbled up out of a basin of clear white sand, so quick and strong that the silver particles rose with it, dancing, catching the sunlight

like diamonds, before they were swept to one side to fall again. Frank had been right, and the marvel of good water in the swamp was true.

"Well, I can come here!" said Miss Kilgore rather slowly. "There's a very good place to sit, and if I make a fire——" She was suddenly aware she was wrestling with temptation. If she came here, and Moulton saw the smoke of her fire, that was surely not her fault.

"If 'if's and an's were pots and pans,' Molly Kilgore," she said to herself smartly, "you wouldn't be bothering to hide from anybody! You shan't do a horrid thing like that, while *I* manage you." It had been all very well to run on Moulton by chance, but she was not going to have him run on her by her own calculation. She marked the way from her ribboned trail to the spring in haste, and glanced at her watch. There was time. She took her courage in her hands, and ran down the path towards Moulton's

spring, and his rocks, where she could never go again.

When she came back she had a few red ribbons in her hand. She had meant to take them all; but he might trust to them, and be bogged in earnest without them. But the first dozen or so had been on safe ground enough. There was a queer smile on her face as she got out on her own edge of the swamp, and regarded her trophy. If she had kept away from the path for a week, so had not someone else. There was a light track worn here and there on it, as if moccasined feet had paced up and down; and cigarette ends, where someone had marked time. She had not been the only person who had been happy in that come-by-chance tea-party. The thought made her stuff the red ribbons into her pocket.

"It's worse than ever," she said forlornly. "I can never go into the swamp again now. I—I won't even let myself *want* to, unless —I really have to." And she looked at

Lygon's shuttered window as she slipped by it to her tent. These last days there had been too much possession about Mr. Lygon's look.

She was thankfully amazed when, after lunch, he suddenly took himself off for the afternoon. There was one day more she could keep out of the swamp. Kilgore, Garnett, and Squires went off, too, on business of their own, she did not care where, and Tita, with a wide yawn, turned to her.

"Since our friend's gone out," she said, "I suppose I can go to bed and have a headache until teatime. And don't, for goodness' sake, disturb me! The headache's real."

"Do whatever you like," said Molly. She sat down on the veranda, with a lazy sense of well-being. She was not sure whether she was asleep or awake, as she wondered how Moulton had learned to call like a loon; even Frank Labrador could not do it—and on a sudden Moulton, everything—but flight—went straight out of her head.

Lygon was coming up from the shore, looking at her with unveiled triumph as he came closer.

Miss Kilgore, who was perfectly transparent in her manners, got up and ran to her tent. She might be a self-conceited fool, but ever since he had lied to her about his paddling she had been sure he lied about everything else—nothing in the world would make her spend the afternoon alone with Lygon. Even her tent was not safe enough to suit her. She wished she had had sense to run to Tita, but it was too late now. Something, that was not reason, told her Lygon had seen the coast clear, and come back on purpose. When the tent door was hooked behind her, she laughed suddenly, and out loud. Those were his footsteps, prowling between her and the shack. Presently he would see every soul had left camp, and come and call her.

Kilgore, returning toward the hour for

cocktails, was aware of Mrs. Marescaux, rejuvenated, on the veranda, and of Mr. Lygon, seated fractiously on the shore, alone.

The afternoon had been a failure, for that gentleman. His brilliant scheme of suggesting an innocent, elevating friendship with a world-weary man (of twenty-five) having come to nothing, he had meant to try some plain speaking, and been sold. He was more than angry; he was bored. Instead of long golden hours of lovemaking to the girl whose eyes and shoulders kept him tossing on his bed at night, his amusement had been conversation with Tita Marescaux, whom he had known from his youth up, and had no particular use for. Kilgore had simply taken him in; the girl plainly meant to have nothing to do with him. He sat looking blackly and sulkily into the heart of the summer sunset, half-ready to make a row.

Kilgore, chewing an unlit cigar on the veranda, was suddenly conscious of the set of his young friend's shoulders; and left Mrs.

Marescaux unceremoniously. It was odd how much of his time he had taken to spending with that lady—to everyone but her.

"What's wrong?" he asked succinctly.

"How the devil do I know?" Mr. Lygon kicked some moss exactly as he could have kicked the host who had brought him here on false pretences.

"Well," said Kilgore, just as sharply, "if you don't know your business, I can't teach it to you! I suppose you mean Molly's gone off somewhere." He was angrier with her than with Lygon, but the good streak in him would not let him say so. "You'd better go and look for her, if you want her; she's about somewhere. I don't understand the pair of you, if you want the truth."

It was so like the proverbial worm turning that it brought Lygon's sulkiness to a head. He flashed a disagreeable look at Tita, placid in a hammock, and checked something that was on his tongue. He was not only mad for Molly Kilgore herself, but

his list of girls with money—and affable fathers—was not extensive.

"I'm easy enough to understand," he said with an excellently done laugh. "I'm like a bear with a sore head. Don't trouble about me; I'll take a sleep." And, without any intention of doing it, he moved off in the direction of the back regions. Something had occurred to him.

There were other ways of leaving a tent than by the door, and when Molly vanished into hers, and left him to watch it till she chose to come out of it, she must simply have crawled out under the curtain on the other side. He apostrophised his own dulness thoroughly, before he took a stroll past the back of her closed tent, that it had just dawned on him was empty. He had learned a little about the woods by this time, and he scrutinised the prospect before him—tall trees, underbrush, and—yes, it was broken bracken! There was a look on Mr. Lygon's face which Mrs. Marescaux might have rec-

ognised. He would find Molly Kilgore, and break her will to his, once for all; he had done it for various women before now. There should be no more of this shilly-shally, and Garnett laughing at him.

Very slowly he disappeared from view, in the direction of the swamp, and, as he saw where his careful tracking was taking him, he smiled. The girl could not have got far, nor would she dare wait for dusk to come home. He floundered a little, and made more noise than Frank Labrador would have considered decent, but he had had from his youth the luck of the devil, and it stuck to him now. He came suddenly on what seemed a faintly worn path, and, as he sat down on a fairly dry stump, a thing made him jump. Standing up, he had seen nothing but the bare stretch of swamp, desolate in the sunset; sitting down, a rose-red ribbon had flashed at him from a squat shrub. Once more Mr. Lygon smiled; but he did not stir.

So here was her playground. It was a queer one; but it was a good thing for him that it had amused her to tie sashes on twigs. He knew the ribbon; and knew, too, that wherever she had gone, she would come back past it. But all the same, he did not light the cigar he held in his hand; she was quite wise enough to scent it and go round him. Over the wide swamp spaces before him, there came a light that might have made many a commoner man than he sit in silent pleasure, but it was not the glory of the dying day that lit Lygon's eyes. He liked taming things, and his methods were quick; in a little while, he would have Molly Kilgore come to his hand: for the sun was going. He sat more motionless than he knew, gripping his unlit cigar in his lips; and, in a nameless crash, something seemed to break clear in his brain. She was coming, and not alone. It was a man's laugh that had gone through him like electricity.

He was wonderfully well made and trained; he could do anything with his body, and silently. As a cat moves, he moved to the ribbon that still had the light of the dying day on it, cut it loose, and stuffed it into his pocket, even while he scanned the place for cover. Off the faint path, there was nothing but bay bushes, acrid sweet, and breast-high; but among their stems, there lay an old log, primevally old, if he had known or cared. With a curious sidelong fling of his beautiful body, Lygon jumped, and lit on the log; he made a very little noise, in his canvas shoes. In another instant he lay flat, out of sight and breathlessly still.

"Something jumped!" said Molly's voice, carrying over the hushed swamp. "Didn't you hear it?"

It was the answer Lygon waited for, and it was long in coming. When it reached him, he lifted his head and listened, as a cat listens when she cannot understand what

she hears: for it was nothing but a queer word that was not English.

"*Na adegâle,*" said Moulton with a little laugh. It was by pure luck he had run on her to-day, after a week of thinking he would never see her again, and of trying to remember Tita.

Molly's voice came nearer to the lier on the log.

"It wasn't a bull-frog at all!" she cried.

"There, you see I know that word. Something jumped on dry ground, but I can't see anything." She stopped, just out of eye-shot from the log. "I'm nearly home," she exclaimed, as if she had just waked up to it; she had been thinking of nothing but the sunset, the swamp, and the man at her side; and late caution dropped her voice to a deeper clearness. They would all be back by now. "You mustn't come any farther; not a step. Please go. I don't really need looking after."

"Shan't I chase away the bull-frog?" asked Moulton teasingly. He was very close to her, and the words reached her ears alone. If he were in a dream, too, he had not waked out of it—yet.

"It wasn't anything," the girl cried. "Please go back. Someone might"—but she stopped, though she had no reason for not being seen, except that this chance afternoon was her very own happiness that needed no onlookers. She had forgotten about Tita and Moulton; and Lygon she had put out of her head.

Moulton made two steps after her as she moved, and it brought him, all but his face, into Mr. Lygon's eyesight—that fastened on his old clothes, and Indian-dark hand.

"*Wèllegìskuk tuh sabðwunawâgh?*" he said softly; and the listener would not have believed that all he asked was: "Will it be fine to-morrow?"—because the meaning of the tone leaped to his senses.

"I don't know," Molly answered un-

easily. "I won't be in the swamp, you know, even if it is. Please go."

Moulton obeyed her.

"*Âdiou!*" he said; and she echoed it. It did not need a wise man to know that was good-bye.

The lithe and noiseless movement in the bay bushes was swifter than the feet of a girl who walked remembering a happy day. Lygon cut her off deftly at the beginning of the rising ground, and in his smooth face was no sign of the hell of passion and contempt in his mind. The red ribbon was no baby game, but a signal. She had slipped away from him to meet a man in the lonely swamp, secretly, crawling out under her tent curtain; and a man who wore the clothes of a lumberer, who spoke an Indian jargon that she understood. It was for a common Micmac half-breed that he had been set aside, flouted, made game of; had been, not would be. He would take her away from the brute, and treat her as she deserved for it—after-

wards. He was not all bad; he had had some good impulses about her, but they were gone now. She had brought herself down to his own level, and on that level he would take her. He stepped quietly out of a clump of spruces, and smiled at the terrified surprise of her face.

Tita, dressing her lovely head half an hour afterwards, turned round with a start.

"Molly," she cried, "what is it? What's the matter?"

The girl closed the door as silently as she had opened it; stood a silent instant; and then ran to the other woman as a child might to its mother, as perhaps no other feminine thing had ever done to Tita Marescaux.

"Lygon," she whispered, with a sobbing breath. "He met me coming home; he—I couldn't do anything. He kissed me. He says he's going to tell father where I was, unless—unless I marry him! He says he's

a Micmac half-breed, no better than Frank" —her voice broke shudderingly; "Tita, he kissed me! He's so strong."

Mrs. Marescaux, by main force, lifted her head and looked into her face.

"Tell your father what?" She was frightened. "Sit down; look at me. Tell me what you mean."

"I didn't know what *he* meant till I—oh, I clawed away from him. I told him I hated him, and he laughed. And I think—I'm not, I can't be sure—I think there was a piece of red ribbon sticking out of his pocket! And father will kill me if he tells him, even though there isn't—there isn't anything to tell."

"Be quiet!" said Tita trenchantly; she had never dreamed Molly could break down like this. She seized a tiny flask from her dressing table, and poured something into a glass. "Drink that, and then talk. Tell me every single thing you mean."

But when the story was out, she turned

sharply to her glass, and stared into her own eyes.

"He's not a Micmac. He's Billy Moulton all right," she said contemptuously, and stopped. Moulton and Molly. Her first thought was possession; Moulton was not to her mind, but he was all she had. Her second was that he had evidently told nothing; and her third made her turn with a little laugh. It was Billy's way to be civil, even to a strange girl; she had heard enough to know there had been no lovemaking at either meeting; he was simply paving the way to Kilgore's acquaintance—and her.

"I'll settle with Lygon," she said angrily. "How dare he speak to you like that, no matter what he was fool enough to think! And don't worry, child; what's a kiss? But let him come out with his Micmac story if he dares!" and she laughed again, superbly. She had him on the hip, if he did.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was with the cheerful purpose of routing Lygon, horse, foot, and guns, that Mrs. Marescaux lingered by her window next morning, watching, behind the blind, her chance to get him alone. She was not anxious to have to inform Kilgore that his daughter's supposed half-breed admirer was no such thing, but Billy Moulton, and her own property; but neither was she particularly worried lest she should be obliged to; it was one of Lygon's little ways to hold threats over the heads of his chosen; a suspended terror was better than a blow any day. Kilgore's face said that he had heard no confidences yet; and Tita, in the shelter of her cool room, yawned, looked at her watch, and polished her finger nails.

Lygon had gone to bathe, Kilgore and Molly were fishing, and she had no desire to join in the desultory conversation of Squires

and Garnett on the veranda outside, over a package of letters just come up from Welsh's. There had been none for her; if she were disappointed she did not show it, even alone. All her interest was in her pink nails and her polisher. It was a sharp word from Squires that made her forget both.

"Lane! I don't believe it. Not Buff?"

Tita's hands fell in her lap. What didn't he believe?

"It's true," said Garnett. His mincing manner had dropped from him like a garment; she hardly recognised his voice. "My God! why couldn't the woman have telegraphed—though I couldn't have got there. But to send me, in one envelope, his last scrawl to me, and her own cast-iron platitudes about it—faugh!"

"What could you have done?" Squires' voice was very low.

"Oh, nothing," wearily. "Can't you see it's not that? Buff's dead. I can't think of anything else in God's world."

"Buff's dead!" Mrs. Marescaux thought she screamed it, but she did not even form the words. She had a wild impulse to break out into long, loud laughter at this silly joke of Garnett's. Buff dead!—who had parted from her strong and laughing—*Buff!* It was only three weeks since she had written to him, to tell him about Moulton; and she had thought there was no answer because he was angry. And all the time he had been ill, dying—oh, God, dying; and she not there! The voices on the veranda went on again, and she was suddenly aware that she was clinging to every word, as if each might be a rope that would hold and lift her out of this sudden hell where everything was cold, and foolish.

"Did you know he was ill? I—I'm deadly sorry for you, old chap," Squires muttered awkwardly.

"Ill? No! I saw there was a letter from the woman, and I thought she wanted me to subscribe to some of her temperance things,

and—here, listen! She calls me 'Dear Mr. Garnett'—because that's the way you begin a letter—and she says: 'Her poor Charles' —(Charles! And the very waiters in the club thought his name was Buff)—'her poor Charles passed over very suddenly on Sunday last. He had been slightly ailing for a fortnight, and had not thought fit to send for her, as she was away on platform business. It was by the merest chance she had returned, and of course had nursed him to the best of her poor ability; indeed the doctors had warned her she was running a serious risk with her own health, in remaining so untiringly in the sick-room; but where her duty lay, she could always find strength; she had, in fact, never left him for five minutes, although there was no reason to expect the end. She forwards, according to his wish, a note he wrote just before the operation. I will, doubtless, understand her unfortunate husband's meaning.'"

"What's the note?" blurted Squires, just

as if he had been Tita's mouthpiece; Tita, grey-faced behind her window frame, grown old in a breath.

"A line; a scrawl. Listen! 'Good old Garnett, I wish you were here. It's dull. In case they don't cut me up properly, I sent Moulton some papers of mine. I wrote him to read them——' "

"To *what?*" interrupted Squires.

"Before God," said Garnett heavily, "I don't know whether it's read them or keep them. Buff must have been at the last pinch when he wrote. See? He's dropped the pen, and it's blurred all the page. But it must be 'read them,' for he says—'all that you know of, he'll give you; I've settled them. The rest he can deal with.' " He dropped the letter fretfully. "I don't want my few hundreds; I'd have given them to his wife if I'd had them. I know she drained him of every cent; he can't have had anything much to leave her. I don't think I was ever so knocked out in my life."

"What's he mean by 'the rest'"? Squires was studying the hardly written lines.

"Letters," Garnett answered shortly; "there was some woman; I never knew who she was, except that she was a lady; there's been a Laura and Petrarch business for years. I know Buff kept every line she ever wrote him, and he must have sent them to Moulton when he felt he was going. He wouldn't leave a scratch in his own house. Mrs. Lane would have published them before he was buried."

"Why didn't he send them to the woman herself? I don't see the force of dragging Moulton in."

"Mrs. Lane never left him for five minutes," said Garnett drily. "That was her duty. But it wouldn't have been her duty to forward a parcel of letters to another lady, nor Lane's duty to provide her with name and date. Moulton was probably best."

"He could have burned them," said Squires obstinately.

"Ever try it? I have—when I was well—and it seems to me it would have taken too much attention if I had been dying," grimly. "There's a deal of burning in letters from a lady, that you've been getting for years. Moulton was the only way. Mrs. Lane wouldn't dare stop his parcel; she'd have had no scruples if it had been addressed to me."

Squires grunted assentingly. There was a rustle of paper as he handed back the note, but the silence was no respite to Tita.

"Letters from some woman—a lady—for years," the words beat like a hammer on her temples. And Moulton was to read them—Moulton!

"He shan't." She stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth to keep from speaking. It was, curiously enough, not the loss of Moulton and his money, that the reading would mean, which agonised her; but the thought of any man's eyes on those letters

she had written to Buff. She tried to think they were perhaps not hers; and could not do it. Buff had never been a woman's man. He had loved her, and been faithful to her; till he died and betrayed her. She could have sprung through the window and seized that note from Garnett just to see for herself what was really written there. Garnett was a fool; he—he could not even read! But she only slipped a little closer to the wide-flung sash to hear more.

"I'm off," said Garnett succinctly; "I can get there in time for the funeral, if I start now. Someone who cares ought to be there."

Tita flung up her head with the torture. The one who cared most must go on polishing her nails, and be gay at lunch.

"Where's Moulton?" Squires asked gruffly.

"Nobody knows! Gone off on one of his breaks. Lane knew, because he was going to him; I doubt if anyone else does. He

won't be there. Shout to Kilgore, will you? I can't. I—I'll miss Buff." His voice broke on it, but all Tita knew was that she got to her door and locked it.

Buff was dead. Garnett was going to see them bury him. There remained herself, who would never be comforted till she died, and she came of long-lived people—herself, and Buff's letters which Moulton was to read—and settle. She sat like an old woman, as she tried to think.

Buff was gone, and all the joy of life gone with him. In all the world, she had but thirty-four dollars—Joe had had one, and Anna, the maid, five of her forty—with the painful accuracy of a poor woman. Thirty-four dollars, and Moulton and his money. If Buff had lived to comfort her she might have seen the last two go; but now they should never go. Underneath her thoughts came the convulsing agony she must not let master her; she forced herself to sit open-eyed, to keep away the

vision of other eyes that were always sad over a mouth that always laughed. She would never look on Buff again. She would never know if he had thought of her when he came to die, because another woman had thought it "her duty" to stay with him; he could write to Garnett, and Moulton, but not to the woman whose only duty to him had been love. She dared not think of Buff, dying. She dragged herself back to Moulton and the letters. They were within reach of her, just across the swamp; and she dared not go for them, even if Molly guided her. There was no woman in the world she could fasten those letters on, if she went and asked for them. He would know they were hers. There was nothing to be done but wait till they came back to her, with the note that would mean poverty, defeat, despair. Nothing. She flung out her hands to the empty room. Surely, surely, there was somewhere a way out! And with a sharp knowledge that hurt, it flashed on her.

"Molly!" She spoke for the first time, and her stiff lips pained her. "Molly: I can have the letters to-day." And she thanked God that she had never written a line in her life—that mattered—to Buff—that she had always used a typewriter.

CHAPTER IX

THERE is no courage so hard to come by as three-o'clock-in-the-afternoon courage. The impetus of the morning is gone, the tide is at the ebb, and the bare shore is ugly. It struck Mrs. Marescaux with a queer sense of incongruity, that it was the most languid hour of the day, that her big, cool room was made for slumber, that even Molly Kilgore sat down uninterestedly when she called her in there. Nothing helped her. If it had been night, and dark!—but it was glaring, searching day. Only desperation opened Tita's mouth. She had lived by her wits these five years, and she must do it yet a little longer. She had had an iron hand on herself all through luncheon, but she took it off, as she shut the door of her own room on herself and Molly.

"I want," she said slowly, and the tone

of her voice made the girl jump, and then stare at her. She had never seen naked agony in a woman's eyes.

"Tita," she cried, "what is it?"

"I'm going to tell you." Tita walked deliberately away, and stood with her back turned. "No, don't come to me, don't even answer me; let me talk. I—it's a long story —and—there isn't anyone but you!" And as she spoke, she picked out what it would be wise to tell, and what she must be silent over. It was hard because, in the quiet of the luxurious room, she had a ghastly consciousness that she feared the dead man in his coffin, whom she would never see. And even as she feared him, she denied him: for the whole truth of things might ruin her. She told what must be told, in a few bald sentences; and when she stopped, there was no answer.

"Well?" she asked; she could not wait. She wheeled round on Molly, and for her life could not read her face. She sat in a

heap on the edge of the bed, and pointed to the window.

"You mean"—she said. She was curiously still, as Tita went to the window and shut it.

"I mean Moulton asked me to marry him the night he brought me here. He never knew anything about Buff—no one ever knew. He had cared for me for a long time, but I kept him off—till then. I was a help to Buff, a comfort—oh, it's no use saying it all, but can't you understand he knew I loved him?—I couldn't have him think I could desert him, who had nothing, for another man who had pretty well all the earth; though, remember," sharply, "I'd begun to like Moulton. But I wouldn't do it. I kept him off till I had no choice, no hope, not even any money. There! You've got all the truth now. I suppose you're judging me, but I tell you that, according to my lights, I've been a good woman. I dare say you're thinking he could have divorced his

wife—that there was no need for all those years of secrecy; but he couldn't. She didn't believe in divorce. He had absolutely nothing against her, and if she'd known over and over all she had against him, she would have ignored it, for the sake of his position and his friends. She was not his class. She clung to him, even while she made his life a burden. I dare say you can't understand—you will some day!—that I wouldn't ask it of him. I loved Buff; and now I've got nothing in the world but Moulton. If he throws me over, I've got to die in the gutter in the end. I'm ruined, Molly! I can't be ruined before all my world, I can't. And think of him! If I get those letters before he reads them, if he never knows they're my letters, he'll go on being happy. He seems happy to you, doesn't he? The night before he asked me to marry him, he was hangdog enough. Can't you like him enough, can't you even pity him enough, to keep him from seeing me as you see me—a

woman who wasn't even true to the man she loved? Can't you save me somehow? I'd do it for you."

"I believe you would," said Molly slowly. She felt stifled in the close sweetness of the shut room. If she could get out into the air, she could think better: she could never think here. Silly sentences kept echoing in her head: "He asked me to marry him the night he brought me here"—well, why not? He had never said a word of lovemaking to the girl he had met in the swamp. And—"he seems happy, doesn't he?"—Oh, yes, he was happy! It made no difference to any girl that he was happy for another woman's sake; he had never said it was for hers. She stood up with a jerk that was not like her. "I'll get the letters," she said; her voice was very steady. "I'll say they're mine; that's the only way. He won't have opened them, and anyhow, they're typewritten. Don't worry any more, Tita; and," she did not falter on it, "I hope you'll go on being

happy, you and he. If you'd told me before, I'd have—but it doesn't matter. You amuse father, and I'll go now. Only"—her composure broke fiercely—"keep Mr. Lygon from following me; for if he does, I'll let him drown in the swamp sooner than listen to his hateful—to the things he says to me. Promise!"

"I promise." Tita gave a dry sob; now that she had let herself go, it was hard to pull up. "But he's out of the way; he went down the lake with Squires and Garnett. I saw him; he can't be back till night. For God's sake, Molly, don't be long. I don't think I can bear it if you're long. And don't you think any more about Lygon. I told you I'd settle him, and I will."

"You needn't," the girl flashed passionately. "I'm doing this for you, not for a bargain. And if father turns me out of doors, I'll never marry Lygon, nor let him lay a finger on me again, while I'm alive. There's only one thing I want to know. Do

you like Moulton? I know what you are if you love anyone; and I know what you are if you don't. Put away his money, and his position—would you care what happened to him? What he thought of you?" There was something queer in her eyes as she waited for the answer.

"I'd care—yes!" Tita replied very low. And so she would. She had no mind to be despised by the meanest thing on earth, let alone a man like Billy: no idea of losing him, even for the sake of that dead man whose closed eyes haunted her. "I tell you I'd care!" she cried savagely. "If you're going, go!"

And Molly went.

The way had never been so long, nor so devious before. She found herself toiling through the swamp, instead of moving lightly from one ribbon to another; sometimes it was with closed eyes that she sought for them. Moulton was Tita's—had been all along. It could not matter what he

thought of any girl he had amused himself by meeting when his head was full of a woman. And there was one thing she could do. If he had thought she crossed the swamp for his sake, she could undeceive him. She had only to ask for a dead man's letters to do that.

As she reached the low amphitheatre of rocks where she had once been so happy, she felt suddenly so exhausted that she sat down and closed her eyes. When she could open them again on a world that was decently steady, the different aspect of the place sickened her. When last she saw it, his fire had burned there; his eyes welcomed her; to-day there were the silent woods, a heap of dead ashes. That wrenched the girl's heart, but it steadied her, too. She rose and went quietly up the hill. She had never been to his camp, but she knew where it was. If he had gone away, like Garnett, she would steal the letters. She owed him nothing—nothing at all, not even common hon-

esty. And as she thought it, she came on him; before she knew it, had met his eyes.

"Molly!" cried Moulton, astounded into the name he had never called her. And then he saw her face. "What's the matter? Are you hurt?" He took her sharply by the arm, and she shook herself out of his grasp.

"I'm all right," she muttered; she caught at a bush, and dragged on it for support, and he saw it. "I—I came to look for you. I—you haven't heard?"

"Heard what?" It was not her face alone, but her whole bearing that terrified him: he had never dreamed that she could look like this. "You're too tired: this hill's too much for you. Why didn't you wait in the swamp? You might have known I'd be there," as if she must know he spent his days there, watching for a girl who had only come there twice. "Do sit down and rest for a moment: you frighten me."

She could not look at him, because his

clear eyes hurt her, since he was Tita's; but the leaf of the bush she clung to stamped itself on her brain. She had to take her breath carefully before she spoke.

"I thought you mightn't come, if you knew. And I had to see you. Mr. Lane is —Mr. Garnett had a letter from his wife, and he's dead!"

"Garnett!" said Moulton stupidly. "But he isn't married."

"No," she could not help whispering, "Lane."

"Lane!" echoed Moulton, "Lane!" His mind went to a hundred things that had puzzled him, and were clear enough now. Lane was dead; and had known he was going to die. "And you—how did you know?" he cried.

He stood quite motionless, as in a few bare sentences she told him, and if he had had any doubts, they were gone when she finished. Buff was dead, and Garnett gone to bury him. If he had known this morn-

ing, he could have gone, too; it was too late now. The shock made him feel sick. He wondered dully why it made Molly Kilgore look sick, too.

"You came all this way to tell me?" he began brokenly; and then the look of her came to him for the second time. This was no kindly messenger. It was a dumb, haggard woman, who cared; who had never, while he had known her, spoken the dead man's name. "You knew him?" he cried involuntarily.

She never raised her eyes.

"You have some letters," she muttered, in a thick whisper he would never have known for her voice. "I came for them. I wanted them—before you read them!"

The man's heart turned over. For one mad instant, he gazed at her. He had known Lane's wife for one of those women whom committees worship and their own households flee as the plague; known, too, that there had been, somewhere, a com-

forter for the man whose home was a mockery, his every action a text for a platform sermon—who lived under a system of petty espionage that his friends might guess at, but of which they were never told. But he had never thought of a girl; nor when Lane sent him a heavy packet last week, had it dawned on him that it held her letters. He had not given a thought to what it held; the note with it had been a puzzle, but he understood it now. He said it over to himself dully; he was to look after the parcel; if Lane could come for it, he would take it again, if not, would Moulton return the papers to their owners? He would know when. And he did know! He felt a sudden, furious rage that Molly—*Molly!*—should have been mixed up in a thing like this—that her white and golden beauty was only a mask for a soul that knew good and did evil. All he did was to stand and stare.

It sent a fierce pang of joy through her to know what his silence meant. She had

hurt him, as Tita and he had hurt her. She could look at him now with steady eyes.

"Will you give me my letters?" she repeated. "You have them; and no one has any right to them except the woman who wrote them. No one."

"You're right, of course," said Moulton slowly, his manner instantly and distantly civil. "Though it need not have distressed you: I should not have dreamed of reading them or keeping them. I should have burned them at once. But since you want them—will you wait a few minutes? I will bring them to you now." And even in his anger, it hurt him that she nodded because she could not speak.

CHAPTER X

HE was at his camp and back at a better pace than he knew; but it seemed hours to the girl left standing on the sunny barren. She had not even sense to sit down, and she had time to cool; to realise that the hard part was still before her, and that whatever happened, she must not give herself away. He must go on thinking what he thought now. And she prayed dumbly that Tita had made no mistake, and that all the letters were in envelopes, and type-written.

Moulton, coming up the hill, saw the colour of her face, the hang of her head that had been so high, and was glad that for sheer humanity he had stopped to get his flask. She was so pitifully young; it was not right that she should suffer like this. He would get his part of her pain over, and let her go. And the thought made him more

agonisedly conscious that he loved her, and that she was Lane's, who was dead. He offered her his cherry brandy, in silence, but she only put away his hand, as if she were too dazed to care to be better. Her eyes were on the bulky packet he held—a common, brown-paper parcel, sealed and corded.

"Can't you be quick?" she said; it had been too much to ask of any girl. Here, under his eyes, she was forgetting that he was, and always had been, Tita's; remembering only a mad desire to justify herself. "Give me the letters, and let me go," she cried. For if she had to do it, the sooner she was out of his sight, the better.

Moulton dropped his flask on the blueberries. His knife shook as he cut the cord of the parcel, and a miscellaneous mass of papers fell at his feet. Miscellaneous, all but one packet of letters, type-written, common-enveloped, that rolled off into the bushes. As he retrieved it in sullen haste, the band round it broke, and the letters

scattered; but the thing that took away the very breath out of him was a sheet of grey paper, written, not typed, that lay flat out on the ground. As he stared at it, Molly sprang to seize it.

Tita had forgotten that last letter of all her letters—written at Kilgore's shack, where there was no typewriter; in her unmistakable, sprawling hand-writing, Moulton saw his own name, and Lane's—and knew!

"Molly!" He had the paper crushed in his hand quick as lightning: for she had sprung swift as a wolf. "Do you dare to tell me that's your writing? You can't do it. I know! Before I ever saw you, I saw a letter from you to Tita; she showed it to me the night she came to my camp. You can't do it."

With an inarticulate, frightened cry, she shrank from him, and sank down in the blueberries. It was the first time he had spoken to her of Tita, and he would know now what

ailed her. He could beat down her pride as he liked, and for nothing but a broken rubber band. She did not know he was on his knees beside her, till she heard his whisper to her:

"How dared you frighten me so, how dared you? Oh, I know all about it, but I love you for it, too. Look at me, Molly! Tell me you care a little, that it hurt you to do it."

The coward's courage that makes women braver than men ran through her body that ached to lean to him; she was not done fighting for Tita yet. She looked straight at him.

"Why should it?" she said lifelessly. "Tita told me. I said I'd do it. It's Tita you're engaged to, not me."

"What!" said Moulton. He sprang up, sobered. "Now? After this!" There was a queer sound in his voice.

"After what?" she said steadily. "You asked Tita to marry you, and she said yes."

(Moulton opened his lips, and stopped at that.) "You had loved her a long time, she told me. And when she said she'd marry you, she wrote to—him—and told him so; broke it all off. What is there in all that? Couldn't anybody throw any stones at you?"

"You know they could," he returned bluntly. "But—look here, Molly! Do you think I'm going to—oh, I can't talk about it! She sent you here to lie to me, and if that packet hadn't burst, I'd have gone to my grave thinking it was yours. I won't have it; I'm going to tell you the truth, whether you like it or not. I was madly in love with Mrs. Marescaux once, she's quite right about that; but I hadn't thought of her for months, till she turned up at my camp that night. She left in half an hour, because I said Lane was coming. I didn't notice it then, but it's clearer now. And then—oh, I'm not going to defend myself; I've behaved like a cad!—then, coming up

the lake, the old obsession, or whatever you like to call it, came over me. I asked her to marry me, and she wouldn't say yes or no. And then, in the sunrise, I saw you. You can believe it or not, but I've been seeing you ever since. It's you I love; and I don't mean in the way I thought I loved Tita—comrade, friend, everything's in it."

"Except honour." She sat crouched in the bushes, quite motionless.

"I don't know!" he retorted recklessly. "Seems to me we're about square. Lane was the best friend I had; Mrs. Marescaux —well, they never even told me they knew one another! I can't do it, Molly; why should I? It isn't as though she cared for me." And his look was at the letters on the ground.

There was no answer. Molly Kilgore was fighting her own battle now; it was she whom he loved, not Tita. The words sang in her head.

"Put it away, dear," pleaded the man

quietly. "I love you, just you. I've been waking up to it ever since the morning I first saw you. I can't hope you care; I seem a pretty contemptible person to care for, but"—he moved a little farther from her: he would not force her the tiniest atom, but his voice shook in spite of him. "Molly, *ăan nigumâach*, can't you do anything but despise me?" And the soft-sounding words that mean "my comrade" caught at her very heart.

"That's the very reason!" she cried. She sprang up and stood facing him. Every inch of her was transfigured, till the carriage of her, the soft fire of her eyes, were not the girl's he had seen in the sunrise, but a woman's, and a woman's steel-supple courage was in her voice. "I do care. And you and I can't stand here making up reasons why you can't marry Tita, because we are the reason. We can't do it."

"Why? It's our life. Everybody else is outside."

"That's it," quickly; "you're putting Tita outside; for me! And do you know what it means to her? She broke down this morning; I never knew she could break down. She loved that man she wrote to, once; she wouldn't marry you before, for his sake, though she had begun to care; she didn't give you an answer till she had written to him—was that a crime? It was because she loved you; she said so."

"What?" He remembered how Tita had run from his house at the very thought of Lane. "I don't think so. If she'd cared, she would have told me the truth, not sent you to get her letters and lie."

"Can't you understand she was afraid? She couldn't bear you to know. And she didn't send me, I came myself. I've made a mess of it, but that doesn't alter things. You can't know how much I owe Tita. She's never failed me once since I've known her. I could never tell you all she's been to me. You see I've never had any other

woman be kind to me, and I can't forget it now, when she's so horribly poor."

"How do you mean she's poor?" He had never connected poverty and Tita.

"All her money's spent," simply. "She hasn't fifty dollars in the world."

"But how?"

"I don't know. I only know it's gone."

"If it were only money"—but he stammered over it.

"She wouldn't take it," she cried fiercely. "You needn't think it's because you have money; if you'd nothing, she'd care for you. I asked her."

"Molly," he spoke very slowly, "I can't. Think of you and me."

"That's just what we can't think of. Can you go to her and say you won't marry her on account of those letters, when your real reason is — me. You know you can't."

"I can tell her the truth."

"I won't have the truth!" she cried out,

as if he had hurt her unbearably, "I love Tita, and she trusted me. Can't you see?"

She had not so trusted the man she meant to marry. But he did not say so. He stared before him with hard eyes.

"We can't end things like this," he said.

"I don't think we've much choice," she answered quietly. "Give me the letters. I must go."

Moulton gathered them up, with a feeling that it was all nonsense, and there never could be an end between Molly and him. Yet, if he had to stick to his bargain with Tita, this was the last time he would ever walk with Molly Kilgore.

"Come on, then," he said, as if it were any other day.

"No," she cried, shivering. She stood looking at him as if she would take in once for all his blade-keen face, his eyes, the set of his head, back and a little sideways. "I'm—it's good-bye!'

"And I won't have it!" retorted the man. "How can you tell? Tita may——"

"She won't," slowly.

For the first time he touched her, but her wrists were lax in his grasp, and his hands fell.

"If she does," he whispered, standing away from her, "if she gives you to me of her own free will, without my even asking her, will you come to me? Promise me that, and I'll do everything you say."

"Oh, I can promise you that, for I'll never have to keep it," she said heavily.

She looked at him with a dull longing. Nothing seemed quite right or quite easy, however she looked at it. She could only do what she could. With a fatalism he could not imitate, she turned away from him, and he knew there was on her lips the farewell she could not say. He stood quite still where she had left him.

For a long time the wind on the lonely

barren saw nothing but the bushes and the shifting shadows of the clouds. Then it was aware of a man who sat up where he had flung himself down because the barren was at least lonely; he had no desire for human eyes on him, not even Joe's. He hardly knew what he thought about while his face lay on the warm earth, and he had no thoughts now that he dared think.

He tied up mechanically all that remained of Lane's ill-fated parcel, and as mechanically picked up his discarded flask, and stuffed it into his pocket; it was something even to be moving his hands. He knew quite well that the sun would fall out of the sky before Tita let him go; the thing was not like a misdeal at cards, where you could shuffle and have it over again.

He supposed dully that Molly was right, and it was not decent to make use of any knowledge about Tita, when his real reason for loathing her was his own unfaithfulness. He stood up and looked about him. He had

not known the sun was so low, and a senseless anxiety swept over him, though there was no more reason to fear the swamp for Molly to-day than any other day. Yet he ran down the hill to it, and felt for his field-glass as he ran. He was never without it now: it had pleased him to stand and look for her white figure, he had never thought to use it to watch her go—for good and all.

"Though it's too late now, she must be at home long ago," he thought, as he unslung the glass. He knew he might watch forever before he saw her coming over the swamp again.

And sure enough, there was no sign of her. It sent that wave of nameless uneasiness over him again, though she had had time and to spare already. Unconsciously he jerked his head to one side, with the gesture she had loved, and it brought the lower end of the swamp into his field of vision, the part she never crossed. He

steadied his glass and stared. There, far out in the green, was a white dot, a mile from the marked path. It could never be—Molly! It went this way and that; paused, hurried with a horrible suggestiveness.

"God!" said Moulton very softly; it was as near as he could come to praying. He marked the white dot, the direction, the distance, the sinking sun, and knew it was not for nothing he had feared the swamp—the soft treachery of it, the green abysses. It had the only thing he loved in its grasp, just as it had had.Ben Christmas and the Frenchwoman's son; she was lost in it, as they had been lost; was—— He dropped the glass and ran, cursing himself that he had let her go alone.

As he leaped and plunged and floundered, keeping his course by sheer recklessness, he would have given all he owned to put some foolish words of hers out of his head:

"You picked a flower, so you'll give it the dearest thing you have; and it's gener-

ally——" She had not finished, and he filled the sentence in for himself fiercely.

"Life! I'll have it life. I won't have it her." If he could get her out by dying for her, he would bless the God that had made him. He ran on, straightfooted, devouring the way, and once he called her by the word that means both comrade and wife.

"*Nigumâach,*" he shouted, "*Āan nigumaach!*"

Very far off a loon laughed; there was no other answer.

CHAPTER XI

IT had been easy enough to turn from Moulton on the sunny hillside, even easy to walk away—for the first hundred yards. With the second, a tearing agony of longing to call him to her, just for one moment out of all the time that was to come, caught at Molly Kilgore.

She shut her mouth hard on his name, and did not know she sobbed on it. She had never been given to crying, but she was blind now with tears; the hopeless, stinging tears of a woman who must dry them for herself. And something had taken the strength out of her. Her knees shook under her as she felt, more than found, her way down the hill that was slippery with pine droppings, hot with the hoarded sun of the long day.

"You fool!" she said to herself fiercely, "you fool! Suppose he marries her a hun-

dred times over, she can never have what's yours. He can never kiss her as he would have kissed you, if he lives with her for a hundred years. She'll only have the outside of things." And at that, her comfort failed her. "Oh, my God!" she said; she stopped, dry-eyed on the sudden, as if her tears had been seared out of her, "he'll kiss her—and what do I care how? It won't make it any better that she has, and doesn't care for, the things I'd sell my soul for."

Half an hour ago, she had been sorry for Tita; now she hated her with a naked passion that made her deaf, dumb, and blind, out in the pitiless sunlight on the edge of the swamp. And Tita was in her power. All she had to do was to go home to her and tell the truth; three sentences of bare truth; and that would be the end of Moulton—for Tita.

"And just as much for me," she thought, with the sharp common sense that came to Kilgore's daughter. "I couldn't get happi-

ness that way; I haven't got the price." For she had not. Tita trusted her, and Moulton loved her. She flung up her head, with a sense of strength come back to her. Fear was the devil that ruined people, and this thing should not make her afraid, even of life alone while Moulton was with Tita. She had held the letters that had cost so much in her hand all this time, and she put them carefully into the pocket of her boyish shirt, and buttoned the flap over them. The thing was accomplished, and if she had made a mess of it at first, she had done it decently in the end. She moved quietly into the swamp, and, unconsciously, cast a quick glance over the green that was beginning to mellow to August. Her heart gave one leap before it seemed to shrivel in her. What was that, half, and only half hidden, behind the first clump of ribboned scrub?

"Mr. Lygon!" Somehow she kept from saying it aloud. "Lygon!" She never

stopped to wonder how he could have got there. In the horrid weakness of dread that swept over her, she forgot even Moulton, forgot Tita; remembered nothing but Lygon's brutal strength, his kisses, his threat that marry her he would, or tell Kilgore——

"What?" She knew on the instant that there was nothing she could dare to have him tell her father now; two days ago it might—oh, with what she had learned today, it would have been different! She would have had Moulton to back her up then; now there was no one but herself. She tried to think it was a silly fear she had of Lygon, that Tita, who was not one-tenth as brave as she was, would never have flinched from him—but he was not mad to marry Tita. She never thought of slipping back to Moulton and safety: it would not have mended matters for either her or Tita if she had; she stared at the sleeve of Lygon's unmistakable shirt, and the fierceness that swept over her and took that horrible

stillness off her heart, was the fierceness of a wildcat. As she stepped back into the bushes she moved like one—as noiseless, as lithe, as rippling a mass of muscle—and as cunning.

Elsewhere, he might be a match for her; not here. The swamp was hers, it would help her; she had not found a way through its maze for nothing, nor to have it fail her now. And as she slipped behind a maple clump, she heard him laugh.

Without her own will, she echoed it, and louder. He was on her path, by her ribbons; and so he laughed. He thought he had her. But it would take more than a Lygon to get her face to face with him this day. She could watch him where she stood. He had come out from behind his covert, and not one atom of the look on his face was lost on her. Well, the big swamp was no place for malice, or triumph, or unwelcome lovemaking to-day. She held her breath, and watched him. The next maple

patch would hide her from him; three steps more—— As he took the last of them, she shot out into the swamp, light-footed, confident, and wild as the wildest animal that walks the night. She was not four yards from him, but they were four yards of bottomless black water, when she stood quietly before his astounded eyes.

"The ribbons are the only safe way, Mr. Lygon," she said deliberately. "If you want to see camp again, stick to them. Oh, I'm not in fun! If you leave them, and get bogged, remember I warned you."

There was nothing mocking about her, she was in too deadly earnest; but with women, Lygon's mind worked only one way. She was flouting him, and people did not do that twice. He measured the gulf between them, and if he had had any take-off, he would have cleared it. But he had to keep easing one foot with the other, even standing still. He took off the very expensive Panama he had not paid for.

"I quite agree with you," he said politely, but with something under his politeness that made her go white with fear. There was that in his eyes, even in his silence, that she knew would cow her if she came within arm-reach of him. He had a power over her, born of brute strength perhaps, but still a power.

If she let him catch up to her, walk with her, she would go out of that swamp his miserable, shrinking slave. She had said he should never touch her again while she was alive, and he never should; the path-less swamp would be better than that. She stood watching him, ready to run helter-skelter anywhere, but to run, when he turned to come to her. But for a long moment he made no movement whatever. He barely looked at her, but she knew what he meant. He moved quietly away toward the swamp edge—and Moulton! The girl's heart turned cold.

Now, with those letters in her pocket,

which made Tita's engagement an accomplished fact, he should never shame her by finding out that she had come over the swamp to meet another woman's lover. He had said things about a half-breed; let him go on saying them—and thinking them. Her whole ugly humiliation came over her as it would be in Lygon's hands, on Lygon's capable tongue. At any price he must never lay eyes on Moulton; she must make him follow her. He must know he could be too quick for her if she stuck to the ribboned way. She ran back on her own track for a quick minute, looked him full in the face, as she passed him with a bound within a yard, and was off like a hare on the path she had travelled day in and day out with the man she loved.

The bait took. He had the heels of her, and he knew it. Running as she had never known she could run, not daring to look back, she heard him coming after her. She knew to an inch what ground he covered

with each springing step, knew when he leaped a pool and saved yards on a double, knew when he gained on her till he was too close for safety, and ran on with her heart bursting in her. It was only a few yards more, if she had the effort in her; and as she came to the thick place in the path, where Moulton had all but foundered, she knew she had. With a rush, a spring, she did it. The good bushes closed behind her, and if the mark of her passage would have been clear enough to Frank Labrador, it was another thing to Lygon. She heard him pass, as, flat on her face, she crawled to the nearest place that would hold her, wormed from there to the next, to a clump of maples where the ground was solid. She had got her breath when she heard him come back.

He was walking slowly, and if she had seen his hands, she might have known why; but she dared not move to try and watch even the waving of the grasses as he brushed

through them. She only knew he was doing something, she could not see what. In a blind panic, she slipped away a little farther, doubled on herself, and lay still. When he was gone, quite gone, she would come out. The ribboned path would be useless unless she followed him on it, stopping where he stopped, hiding where he waited, till she came to the quarter of a mile where she dared cut loose from it and make for her own camp. The sun was an hour lower before she stood up boldly to look about her, and what she saw choked her.

She was out in the swamp, far farther out than she had thought; and there was a deadly quiet, a horrible sameness about the place that terrified her. Her red ribbons were nowhere to be seen. She tried to follow her own track back to the place where she had left them, but the quaking ground she had dared when she ran from Lygon, was another thing in cold blood; she could not do it. And the glance she threw at the

sky was no help to her. It was clouding thunderously, in another ten minutes she could never find her direction by the sun; she had no time to waste even now, in looking at it. She made an angle for the path, and missed it.

It was only a little later that she moved away from the highest bit of ground she had been able to find, with a queer dulness in her eyes and brain. Her ribbons, for all she could see of them, might never have been put there; she was not even sure which was the right way to look for them; when she crawled away from Lygon, she had turned herself round.

"If the sun had stayed out"—she thought despairingly; but now all ways looked the same to her. To strike back to Moulton was impossible, the ground between her and the edge of the swamp would not hold a fox. And besides—she was too practical not to see the anti-climax—if those letters were to get to Tita without any fuss,

and Lygon was to be checkmated, she must get home to dinner. She tightened her belt mechanically, and started.

Time and again she came to places she had passed already, but she had expected to, and it did not trouble her; her wits only felt a little more numb, which was a pity, since it was to them she must trust; the thing that frightened her was when she ceased to come to bushes passed before, and to clumps of alder and maple. She was in a place she had never seen. A strange bareness was round her, which seemed to stretch for miles till it melted in indistinguishable hill and thicket somewhere very far off. It was green here and there with a horrible greenness, it sucked at her feet where she moved slowly up and down, back and forward, and over it there lay a sky that threatened—dull, lowering, evil.

If there was no wind to move the quivering cotton tops, why did they bow and sway forward as if something brushed through

them? What was it that made her shrink sharply to one side or the other, as if hands had been stretched out to clutch her? It was daylight; she knew in a sort of way where she was; what had given her that choking terror of the flowering grasses, the nameless low bushes? There was horror all round her—horror that bade her run anyhow, anywhere, but run, till she found a bit of high ground and safety. Oh, the place was evil, evil! Not one of Frank Labrador's stories of it had carried half the wickedness of it; and at the thought, they all crowded into her mind. The voices where there were no people; the footsteps that bade you follow a trail where no trail could be; the long wailing that had lured Ben Christmas to his death, because it was the voice of the woman he loved that called his name. And the drowning of the Frenchwoman's son, who had walked softly into a deep runnel, because he was blinded by a dead girl's hair. She picked her steps

tremblingly, and got on a little; and at the crawl of the ground under her feet, got back again, sickly, to the bleached root of a tree dead ages ago.

"I won't be afraid of it," she thought, trembling, clammy-handed in the dull heat, the heavy air. "Why should I be afraid? I gave it the dearest thing I had once; I've given up all I cared for this very day; it's got nothing to take away from me."

But all the same she was afraid. If she had to sit here through the dark to daylight, she would die of it; and when they found Ben Christmas, not even Labrador had understood the marks on his throat. And he had been within ten yards of the margin when he fell.

"Frank will come to look for me," she said. She wiped the cold damp from her face. Of course he would come—if she could ever stay where she was till he found her! If she heard those voices, that awful

calling in the Indian words she had learned to understand, she knew she could never stay; she must get up and run till she fell smothering. Every nerve in her stretched to listen for the sound it would kill her to hear.

The heady scents of the swamp flowers came up to her, sweet, stifling, feverish; the belt of thunder that drifted from the horizon covered bit by bit the comfort of the sky; the grasses were deadly still, and she never missed their swaying. There was a sound, a stealthy, growing horror that came nearer—she crouched forward like a thing at bay, put her fingers in her ears, and stared.

She heard it!

It was before her, behind her, she did not know where; but she heard it. Through the fingers in her ears, unmistakable, electric, came the Indian words she had known she would hear, ever since she sat down.

"Nigumâach, oolâtet!" ("Here, my comrade!")

When they talked of the swamp now, they would say: "Ben Christmas; and the Frenchwoman's son, and—Molly Kilgore."

CHAPTER XII

"OH, nigumâach, oolâtet!" There was no shutting it out; and she knew the voice, just as Ben Christmas had known the voice that called to him in the evening two years ago. Her hands fell to her sides, like a swimmer's who ceases to struggle; Frank's stories were true. And over the thought came another sound.

It cut clear like a knife, it lifted her to her feet, it flung the blood from her heart to her face in the dimness. It was the old, old call of a loon to his mate—and she knew it. Just so had he called that morning out of the mist, before she ever set eyes on him. It was neither ghost, nor Labrador, nor Lygon; but Moulton! She answered in the language he had taught her.

"Ankôdain, na mògw'owtēēch!" ("Take care, there is no path.")

She heard her name in English. If she had known his voice at first, she would not have known it now; for it broke. But she had turned and seen him. Foot by foot he got to her, and as he reached her, she saw his eyes.

"Oh, Molly!" he said. "Molly!"

She was past answering. She felt his arms catch her, felt his heart hammer under her cheek, as he lifted her bodily and held her.

There was no swamp, no world, as he kissed her. Nothing but his eyes, his lips, his hard cheek against hers.

"I never thought you'd come," she said pitifully. "If I'd known, it would have killed me; for—there's no path."

"No?" he laughed, and caught her harder to him. "There's always a path for me to you, always. But"—he set her down gently, and, as he steadied her with one arm on the slippery root, she saw for the first time how hard he was breathing—"I

called and called you," sharply; "why didn't you answer me? And for Heaven's sake, what brought you this way? I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw where you were going. I——" He stood looking at her, as Tita never had seen and never would see him look. "We've got to get on, out of here, while there's any light at all," he said hastily. "But, first, tell me this much. Did you take them away on purpose?"

"What?" she looked blankly at him. She was so happy that nothing mattered, not the swamp and the dark, nor even tomorrow and Tita. "I don't know what you mean."

"The ribbons! I saw you from the hill, missed you when I went after you, went back over and over to your path, and—I couldn't find it. The ribbons are gone."

"He must have taken them," she returned stupidly. "He said, you know, that he'd be even with me."

"Even with you! Who? What do you

mean?" It was a different man who spoke, and it frightened her.

"I never meant to tell you. It doesn't matter," she stammered. "But I—I couldn't help being afraid of him, and then I was afraid he was going to find you, so I ran. I heard—oh, it doesn't matter, nothing matters! You found me. I—oh, I was so afraid! I couldn't think just what to do, because I was—so afraid."

"Tell me," he ordered, as if he had a right to order; and she turned on him with a flash of her old spirit.

"While I think we can get out, I'll never tell you." She met his eyes as a man would. "If we can't—I'll tell you." Because if she was going to live in the same world with Moulton, even if she never saw him again, he should not know that Lygon had kissed her nor how he had dared to speak to her. "It was someone I hate. More than that, you've no right to ask me. I ran, if you want to know, because I could not dare to

have it known that I'd come across the swamp to meet you; for I'm nothing to you," bravely.

"You're everything!" He stooped before she knew it, and kissed the hem of her skirt. "And I mean you to be."

Molly winced, but in the dusk he did not know it.

"We fought that out this afternoon," she said; she was suddenly horribly tired, stiff and sore all over. "What I did, I did for Tita—and I mean to keep on doing it! Oh, can't we get out? Think of her frightened to death, and waiting for me, while you and I are loitering here. I can't bear it, Billy. I—I'm too tired. Do you think we can get out?"

"Yes." His heart contracted as he lied. Their only guide was gone, and if it had not been, they were far out of reach of it. He had no guess as to what had become of the ribbons, nothing except guilt that it was for his sake she was here. If he had not be-

haved like a cad and an idiot, it would not have mattered who saw her coming away from him. He took his arm from her, to turn and stare at the dim horizon, and she cried out:

"Hold my hand, don't let it go! Tell me, do you know where we are?"

"The swamp runs from northwest to southeast. That ought to be the end of it." He pointed, and let his hand fall.

"But you don't know that it is." She had understood quietly. "It's so broad here, it all looks alike."

He did not answer. Surely there was some devilment in the place that had turned him round. The clouds had crept up till, for his life, he did not know which was afterglow, and which eastern reflection; and a sharp flicker of lightning let her see his face.

"We can't wait," she whispered; her voice was steadier than his had been. "The root's settling under us."

Moulton made no sign that he heard.

"That's the north," he mused. "The thunder's coming up against the wind." He wet his finger and held it high to get the draught. "It's north, Molly!" he laughed creditably—"we've got to go north, and a little east of it." And in his soul, he was aware that he would give all he had in the world for a twenty-five cent compass and a lantern, for the dark was coming now in good earnest, palpably, with each minute. He remembered the flask he had stuck in his pocket, and felt for it. She had said she was tired; it would pick her up—but the flask was gone! It must have fallen out while he was floundering after her.

"It's all of a piece to-day," he said. "I don't seem to have common sense. I've lost the flask, and if you'd had a drink—but you haven't! I'm afraid you're nearly dead."

"I was"—she said. "Not now!"

"Then we'll have a try at it," cheerfully; he was worried about nothing but the drawn

weariness of her face. "At the worst, we can find a dry spot, and wait there!" hastily. "You're not afraid?"

Molly Kilgore laughed very softly.

"I'm not afraid now," she said; and with the laugh still on her lips, she kissed him, while the root gave under her feet.

They had changed places now, it was he who led, she who obeyed him; and for a minute he stood thinking. Where the fireflies lit the air in a thousand sparks, they must not go; nor where, here and there, a Jack-o'-lantern burned. He wished childishly that the lightning would keep steady, or at least come in long flashes that would let him get his bearing before they vanished. And then something came to him, as, single file, his hand held behind him, grasping hers, they felt their way from one treacherous foothold to another.

"Did you see any flowers, before dark?" he asked abruptly.

"It's all flowers," she returned in amaze-

ment. "Yellow and white and pink and orange. Can't you smell them? I can. I saw heaps of them just before you came."

"What kind were the white ones? Think!" insistently. "Low, like wax, very sweet?"

"No." If it had been anyone but Moulton she would have said: "Why?" "They were very white, on high stalks—like snapdragons—something."

"Hurrah!" he cried boyishly; she felt the sharp thrill that ran from his hand to hers. "Well," irrelevantly. "God bless them!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, please God," sobering, "they'll take us out in time, if we can only spot some. Watch the flashes, Molly, and mark those flowers wherever you can see one. They grow—I forgot you couldn't know it—on good bottom; they're not water plants, like those cursed pink orchises and things. Don't look at the lightning, look at the ground."

It was hard looking, and worse footing. Sometimes they made a yard, sometimes they went back two, but always with a little gained toward the north. Once he went down to his knees, and she dragged at him, till they stood together again in a patch of white, sick and shaken; and time and again she fell. It was not the black runnels that started out before them in the lightning quiver that startled her, but the wide spaces, bare of any flowers at all, that heaved like the sea, as they skirted the edges of them; the tussocks of grass they trod on that were gone as, in the next flash, she looked behind. There was life too, horrible rustling life, all about them; channel after channel was thick with water snakes, the green and copper of their backs showing metallic in the electric glimmer that left the world black, and themselves stirless till it came again. After a time they hardly spoke at all—the girl, because she wanted all her breath, the man from other reasons. He could not keep

dragging her on like this all night; they must rest, somehow. On a patch of white flowers, where the ground at least was steady, Moulton stopped. For a long ten minutes, there had been no lightning, he had just groped; and where he stood, he could see nothing at all beyond a dim glimmer of the white flowers round their feet. They must have come a long way north, for all they had been slow; if he could only see something, they might be nearly out.

"I've two matches," he said hopefully. "Stand where you are, and I'll strike them; anyhow we may as well know the time." He let the blue flame grow to yellow in his hand, while he looked at his watch, and then at the dimness before him. He had no more idea where he was than the dead. As for the time, their wanderings had eaten up the hours; there was no hope now of getting her home before her absence was noticed. And he dared not go on in the dark; he must wait for daylight. And even as he thought it,

there came a glare of blue light, and showed him something that turned him cold.

"Get back a little," he said softly; for there was no more ground to walk on. He had followed the wrong kind of flowers in the dark; it was a wax-fleshed, water-orchis that crushed under their feet. The broken blossoms smelt of death. "Get back a step," he repeated.

"We can't," she answered more softly still. "Light your other match and look."

When he had done it, he threw the still burning flame into the muddy water that had been ground ten minutes ago. They stood on a little island that was crumbling under their feet. Neither of them said a word. Presently she shivered.

"You're cold! you'll get your death shivering here," he said sharply; "and only my confounded carelessness lost that flask. Stand close; put your arms round me!"

She did not move.

"What time was it?" she began, and

stopped that he might not hear her teeth chatter.

"One." If he could only see a light, if someone had come out to look for them, and had a light, he might get her across the runnel before them. But there was no light anywhere, and he could hear the channel suck as it widened already.

"Can't we go on?" she whispered.

"We've got to," grimly. "I'm—only thinking——"

"Do you think we can? To-night?"

His voice caught. Not to-night, nor by morning either, if they stayed where they were. But he did not say it.

"Yes. Pull yourself together, Molly, listen!" sharply; for she was suddenly leaning hard against him.

"I think—I'm done," she said dizzily. "You go on. I—I can't."

"Rest, and you can. You must!" desperately.

She shook her head.

"Do you—mind much?" she whispered; and felt his arms tighten.

"Mind! When it's all my fault, because I let you start alone? Oh, Molly!" he pressed his face to hers for fear he should groan. "Of course I mind."

"I don't." Her voice was very tired. "I'm glad. I—I'd rather: I'd never have kissed you."

For a moment he stood silent, dry-eyed, sick. His watch ticked in his pocket with a curious loudness that reminded him of dropping water. Over it he heard her voice in his ear.

"Let me go!" she said fiercely. "Move!"

"Not yet. Get your breath."

"You must! The water's over my feet. You can jump; jump, and go."

"No," he snatched her up, and held her like a baby. "It shan't touch you," he said easily, just as if the droop of her body in his arms had not sickened him. Somehow

he must rouse her, put the love of life into her, even if it were only for another hour. He shifted his feet to the last inch of dry ground. "Look here, suppose we have to stay here—you said you'd speak out then. Who did this?"

"Mr. Lygon." She spoke almost absently, as though she were thinking of something else. "He took the ribbons. He—he thought you were a half-breed; a Micmac."

"Lygon?" He stood absolutely unbelieving; "Lygon!" But as she whispered something, he laughed with anger. "Well," he said coolly, "he did me a service. It's better to be like this than you in your camp, and me in mine—forever! I think," deliberately, "we'd better get home, and thank Mr. Lygon." It was time: for the water was crawling over his feet, with the double weight.

Something electric, positive, flashed over Molly Kilgore.

"I hear something," she said. "Put me down and listen. Take your arm away: I can't hear anything but your heart." As he obeyed her, the water rose over her knees, but she hardly noticed. "Listen," she repeated, "what is it?"

"Nothing. It's——"

"It's someone looking for us." She cut him short. "It's—— Billy!" It was a cry, frantic, appealing, and he sprang to her.

"Hang on to me—quick! Molly!"

But he was too late. She was gone. He had lost her, and, that very afternoon, he had sworn he would have it life, not her.

"I'm damned if you shall do the choosing!" he said, very quietly, to the swamp that lay relentless round him. He dragged his feet from the sucking mud, and dived coolly into the mire where Molly had sunk almost without a sound. His hands, and then his body, shot through fetid slime out into deep water. The swamp had tossed his life back to him.

When he clutched something he swam; he could not tell where, but he swam. They were in a wide channel, thick, stirless, loathsome; but water, not mud. He could not tell whether he swam up or across it, in the dark; but he swam, with a dead weight leaving a wide wake behind him, and the sound of his overhead stroke loud in his ears.

CHAPTER XIII

ON the veranda at Big Lake Teâm, Kilgore sat opposite Mrs. Marescaux in uneasy silence.

There had been something wrong all day, and he had tried to put it down to Garnett's bad news and hasty departure, but there was a native shrewdness in him that told him there was more in the air.

Molly had brushed by him after lunch, with a look on her face he had never seen there, and when he called to her, she ran. Lygon had come back from seeing Garnett off, and had sneaked—there was no other word for it—sneaked off in the bushes, when he caught his host's eye. Squires was played out, and had taken to bed, instead of drinks and the usual afternoon cards. Mrs. Marescaux—Kilgore's sharp glance took her in from her pale face to her slim hands, and he was at no loss to see that Mrs. Marescaux was not herself either.

He spoke up suddenly.

"Did Lygon go off with Molly?" He admired Tita for many reasons, but for none of them did he mean her to interfere with Molly's marriage; if she had been restless and unhappy all the afternoon because of Lygon, he meant to know it. And before she answered him, he did. There was real indifference in her eyes as she turned to him.

"I don't think so. She doesn't like him, Mr. Kilgore!"

"Why not?" shortly.

"Well," she said thoughtfully; "if I go a long way back, I think I can realise how he strikes her. There was once a man who wanted to marry me, whom I began to hate the very second I knew it. I'd have run miles from him; and I never could run. And even that was not like dealing with Lygon." She had put herself and her biting anxiety out of her mind, and spoke quite truthfully and simply; for here was her

chance to keep her promise to Molly. "Let her alone. If she did like him, and sat here waiting to be proposed to, he wouldn't do it. He's a Lygon."

"Do you mean he wouldn't want her, if he could get her?" His heavy face darkened.

"Mr. Kilgore," Tita took a sudden resolution, "suppose you and I speak out! I could help you, if you'll tell me what you have in your head for Molly."

Kilgore looked at her, and nodded. He was a lonely man, in his mind.

"It's like this," he began haltingly; "you know what I am, and what I came from. Molly's different: her mother was a lady; and I mean her to be a lady too. Do you suppose I don't see things? She's educated, she's good-looking, she's—well, it doesn't matter! But all she gets is—'Oh, the Kilgore girl!'—and some hard staring. The women I want her to know won't notice her, except you. And the men I can get around

her, except Lygon, are——" He shrugged his thick shoulders.

"You mean young Mrs. Lygon would be the other thing," assentingly. "Yes! Only —but of course, you know!"

Kilgore met her candid eyes.

"You mean you don't like him?"

"Oh, I like him!"

"Then what?"

"I have myself to care for; I've done it most of my life. When I see who the men are who won't have Rex Lygon in their houses, why"—her rings flashed crimson in her hint of a gesture. "I don't have him in mine! He's a Lygon. It's their way."

"Put it straight," said Kilgore roughly.

"There's nothing tangible," she answered quietly. "It's none of my business, but I'm fond of Molly. I would like to see her happy, as well as married. If you saw fit to trust me, I think I—could find someone better." She looked vaguely before her with nobody at all in her mind; but Kilgore

gathered, as he was meant to gather, that she knew of better fish in the sea than Lygon. "Don't encourage him," she added quickly. "I know that kind better than you. And she's very dear to you, I know."

She was not prepared for the look on the hard, heavy face.

"That's the reason," the man muttered. "It cut me, last winter. I'd rather she'd be done with me and my kind."

"Then trust me." She held out her cool hand to him impulsively. "Think of it as business, Mr. Kilgore," she added swiftly, "and don't buy on a falling market. Society isn't bullish on Lygons—matrimonially!"

She had said all she wanted to, and she moved away; but not to her room. She had prayed Molly not to be long, and that was hours ago. Perhaps all Tita had suffered in the long, hot afternoon was put down to her for righteousness: it is currently supposed that agony is atonement; but agony or not, she could not bear it any longer. She

walked down toward the swamp edge, and saw the sun was gone; and there was neither sight nor sound of Molly.

"There can't be anything wrong," she thought feverishly. "He can't have suspected—read the letters!" She shook off a sick premonition of danger, as she had shaken off worse things all day, and turned with a smiling face to the step she heard behind her. It was Lygon. She had not known he was back, and she stood looking at him. He was a mass of mud and water, and his smooth face was as even she had never dreamed his face could be.

"How long have you been back?" She spoke calmly, to her eternal credit.

"Long enough," he returned significantly. "So you're looking out, too!" He laughed, and it frightened her. But he could not know. She assured herself, and she kept on smiling, that he could not know.

"Molly's late," she said simply; "I feel anxious."

"I don't." She saw suddenly that he was forcing himself to speak quietly, that he was livid. "If you're thinking about the swamp——" He moved in front of her, and stood staring silently. There was no movement anywhere, and out of the north a mass of thunderclouds had risen. It seemed to soak up the dying daylight as she looked at it; and once more she was horribly and senselessly afraid.

"What do you mean?" she asked breathlessly.

"I mean a man," blackly. "Do you imagine she's alone out there? Kilgore does. But the charming Molly goes to meet——" A man would have knocked him down for his sneer.

"Who?" Her fright half choked her.

"A half-breed." His laugh was venomous. "A common Micmac half-breed who can't even speak English. I saw her with him to-day—and other days. Don't look so

nervous; she'll probably be back in the morning!"

Tita stood back from him. She was suddenly dangerous, in her relief that at least he did not know Molly's errand, nor Moulton.

"I always knew you were a devil," she said slowly. "I never knew you were a liar, too."

Lygon laughed again.

"It's just what I'm not. Look here!" He pulled from his pocket a handful of weather-worn red ribbons. "These were her little signals; she had them all over the swamp to mark the way to cross it. I gathered them in as I came back to-day. You didn't know I'd gone after her, but she did; she slipped from me like a hare. I told her yesterday that if she crossed the swamp to her friend again, I'd be even with her; and I think I am. I'll see what Kilgore thinks when she doesn't come home, and then—I'll see whether I'm to be persuaded into marrying his daughter."

Mrs. Marescaux, all in one minute, looked like death.

"You used her ribbons to show you the way home, and gathered them up as you were done with them!" she said. "Do you know what you are? You——" She wheeled like the wind with the words unspoken, and was yards away before he knew it. "Go to Kilgore and tell him all you think," she shrieked over her shoulder; "go, now, and tell him what you've done!" She knew what the stolen ribbons meant, and that was death for Molly Kilgore; but she would not warn him. If Molly were dead, he could hang for murder. Let him incriminate himself as fast as he could. As she ran through the low-lying scrub, she snatched a look at the darkling sky, and cried out:

"Frank!"

There was no answer. She forgot all about Lygon, all about Kilgore; she must find Frank Labrador and tell him. If it

was not too late for even Frank Labrador, the son of devils, to find a girl smothering in that black swamp below her! And this night of all nights, the Indian was not in his tent.

It was half an hour before she came on him, and in the dark she dragged at his arm. If he had a stupid fit, she could never make him understand her, and perhaps he would not go if he did.

"It's Miss Kilgore," she said. "She's lost in the swamp." She shook so that she could hardly make him hear her, but when he understood she saw his eyes flash in the gloom. "For God's sake, hurry!" she said harshly. But when he had moved away, she ran after him, like a child afraid to be left alone in the dark.

There was no sound in all the camp, except the making of dinner in the kitchen. Lygon had vanished; if he were with Kilgore, he could stay there. But for Tita, who had sent a girl to death, there was no stay-

ing. She seized a lantern from a tent, lit it, and was at Labrador's heels before he was ten paces into the swamp.

"She'd marked a track with ribbons," she cried into his ear, "and they're gone! She must have strayed. If I carry a light, she may see it."

Labrador snatched the lantern.

"We walk too fast!" he said angrily. "Go home."

But she only caught her skirts to her knees, and followed him. Once she spoke, and he hushed her with an uplifted hand. Time and again he lay down and listened. Far up in the north, there was an unceasing shift of lightning, a low mutter of thunder; but nothing else in all the waste.

"Call out, why don't you?" she panted. "Shout!"

For sole answer, the man turned on her, and in the sheet lightning pointed dumbly to something even she knew. They had made no way at all. They had come straight back

to where they had started, in a line with the shack.

"Look, see!" he said briefly; and an angry hail came to them from the camp.

"Molly! Where the devil have you been? Come back here."

"You go, tell!" said Labrador sharply; "I look some more."

"They know already," Tita answered callously. Let Kilgore suffer a little, it would not hurt him; he could have taken better care of his daughter than by asking a man like Lygon to camp. And let Lygon have time to tell all he could think of; she would have the more to prove a lie.

She could hear quite well that they were coming after her, Kilgore and Lygon, she supposed, and Squires; but she would not wait for them. It was beyond her to stand still, even for a moment. She must be doing, not talking; and Labrador, at all events, was silent. She could not bear those men and their talk—Kilgore's anger, Ly-

gon's sneering. If Molly were drowned he should swing for it; it would go hard with her if she and the truth could not make him swing. She was like a savage animal, as she sprang at Labrador and tore the lantern out of his hand again.

"Go on," she said, "and think! Those people that were lost in the swamp, whereabouts did they find them? Her path was gone; where would it look easiest for her to stray?"

"Up; to the big channel," said the man; for the first time in his life he respected her. "Up! You walk after me. Those old men too fat. But he never swim that channel alone; too deep, too wide." And even as she heard him say it, she was wondering how Lygon could be so fatuously ignorant of the danger of the swamp, as not to hurry all hands into it, instead of bringing them after her. But he should not catch up to her.

Where she went and how she went, she

never knew. Labrador was in the swamp and out of it, up the hillside, staring, listening; and at his heels, with her trailing skirt long ago discarded, the laces of her petticoats hanging in rags, came Mrs. Marescaux with the judgment day in her face. If her breath was like a knife in her, she never knew it, any more than that her ankles were cut and bleeding, her knees giving under her. She was all steel wire and ears, as she toiled after her silent leader, while hour went into hour, and there was no sound in all the wilderness but the crashing of branches behind them, the spasmodic shouting of Kilgore or Squires. Lygon was silent. Tita hoped to God he was afraid, as she was afraid. But when, at long last, they had left the others out of earshot, after miles of going up and down, and here and there, Labrador stopped. As he turned, and she saw his face in the lantern light, she caught at a bush and dragged on it.

"We think," he said quietly, "we come

too late! He turn his face away from us."

"Who?" She sat down where she was, sickly; she had forgotten, if she ever knew, that he had no other than the masculine third person singular, "Who?"

"That Molly. You good woman; God see you; but you tell me this too late. Him past one o'clock. That swamp quicker nor that. You sure he start?"

"Sure," said Tita. Had not Lygon said so to her face, and laughed over it? Over the thought, she was faintly aware that the others were getting close again; she heard them crashing through the underbrush, catching up; and listened with avid hatred. If Lygon dared to come to her, and be sorry, she would tell things that would make them throw him neck and heels into the swamp. She got up and stood staring into the darkness dully, as if her mind were failing her before her body; and the short rest had made her know how little more there was in that.

And as she tried to gather herself up to meet Lygon, something crashed on her ears like a blow. The swamp carried sound like still water; she had heard something—that was not the trees nor the wind nor the breathing of the Indian beside her.

"Shout!" she cried; she stamped her foot at him. "Shout!"

He obeyed, half-heartedly.

"We don't hear nothing, we don't see nothing," he said, breaking off in the middle of his call to listen. "We tell you we come too late."

The only answer she made him was to stand like a deer, with her head in the air. His voice went over her like a wave, and underneath it, the sound that made her swing her lantern high and run, not back into the swamp, but up along the edge of it.

"Molly!" she screamed as she ran; "oh, Molly!" And someone answered. But even as she was sure of it, she knew it was not Molly, and her heart quailed in her. If

Molly were all right, she would have heard that call.

Labrador was past her like a flash, running as she had never thought any man could run. She never knew how she struggled after him, falling, getting up again, running—but she did it. And as she fought her way over a boulder, she heard his voice.

"Hold him light! Hold him."

Mrs. Marescaux, the tears streaming down her face, her fear like a knife in her, answered to the word. She could hear Labrador far ahead of her, out in the dark. By and by he shouted warningly, and someone spoke in answer; but it was not Molly. There was a crashing splash, a silence—and, long years after it, the Indian's voice jargoned, meaningless:

"*Èmmagoamõõ kissabârsea! Na kelõõsit cheeginam.*" ("You are through the bad place. Well done, my brother that is younger than I!")

Then a deader silence, a blacker darkness, and out of them no sound at all.

Tita, who despised praying women, crawled on a rock, that her lantern might show farther, and spoke out loud.

"Good God, let me see! Blind me afterwards if you like, but let me see now." And on the heel of her voice, came a long lightning fork, green and blue and ominous; but she saw.

Far out in the dark were two men; and one of them carried a burden. She knew, as the dying know, who it was—the strength of him, the iron slow movement, the flung-back head.

"Billy!" she said, "Billy!" She could have sold her soul to run to him, and see that what he carried was alive; but she had been told to hold the light, and she held it, standing still.

Along the bank behind her, she heard men running. It was the others, caught up to her at last in the long chase; Kilgore,

Squires, the cook, and two men; straggling behind them, Lygon.

"Molly?" gasped Squires, not Kilgore. "Have you—is she found?" The fat man was crying.

Kilgore had never said a word, but as he saw who she was, he burst out at her.

"What the devil's all this, madam?" Between exertion and rage, and the brow-beating of Squires, he was on the verge of apoplexy. "Are you—*you* in it?"

With her face a mass of smears and scratches, her smart gown torn off her back, Tita turned and thrust her light into his hand.

"Molly's found, and perhaps she's alive," she said brutally. "Hold the light here, if you want to save her. This is Rex's work, the whole of it. You can settle with him afterwards, when I tell you what he's done." She never knew what told her she must run to Moulton, but she ran.

CHAPTER XIV

LYGON, behind the others, had not heard a word Tita said. He had not been too comfortable for the past three hours, because even while he delicately insinuated to Kilgore that he had left Molly in remarkably doubtful company for a white woman, he could not help remembering that he had seen her fly off into the swamp alone. But when in the lightning flash he had seen what Mrs. Marescaux saw, he laughed contentedly. She was coming home with her half-breed, just as he had said; Kilgore would see for himself—and next month the little adventure would be covered up with a fashionable, and profitable, wedding. He forgot that he had repeated over and over, very quietly, that a half-Indian who knew the swamp would keep her on the other side of it—till morning; but Squires, glancing at him with an ugly line round his mouth, remembered; and stopped snuffling.

"Rex's work!" Tita had said. He pondered on it thoughtfully, and edged his stout arm nearer to his young friend's shoulder. "Rex's. H'm!" mused Mr. Squires, who was, to an extent, in Kilgore's rare confidence. "But why?" It was probably a woman's jump at conclusions, and a spiteful jump, too. And then it dawned on him that if Molly were used to going through the swamp, as Lygon had said, there must be some reason, beside the dark, that had lost her there to-night. He had never heard of the ribbons,—but he was acquainted with Lygon. He was, in some way, taking change out of circumstances—forcing somebody's hand—only Squires could not see why. But he had an idea that he would keep a cinch on young Lygon.

"Brace up, Kilgore!" he cried cheerfully, covering his intention. "Frank's got her!"

Kilgore never answered him. He stood dumfounded, understanding nothing at all, but that Molly—his Molly—had gone to the

swamp, day in and day out, to meet a half-breed; and that all the camp seemed to have known, but him. He was shaking with fury and pain. Molly and a half-breed! And a flicker of lightning showed him something that checked his pulses sickeningly.

A man was struggling out of the swamp, carrying something. He laid down the weight, and the look of it startled Kilgore. It could never be Molly who lay like that on the ground. But it was the lithe shoulders of a half-breed that bent over her, nevertheless. The man groaned with belief of the lie he had just flung in Lygon's face. And then he had to wait in the dark to get to them to know if Molly were dead or alive, to—in any case—kill the mongrel who had dared to look at a white woman. He was conscious that Lygon was talking very fast in his ear, but he did not hear the words. And, fifty yards off, Tita had Moulton by the arm.

He flung her away from him.

"You've killed her, between you"—he choked on it, remembering the long battle through the swamp, where each step was like to have been their last. "Don't you see she's been half-drowned? She fell into the big channel. If it hadn't been for Labrador, I couldn't have saved her; I didn't know where I was swimming to. And I suppose you know whose fault it was. Oh, don't touch her! You've done enough." He had knelt down, and was rubbing the girl's cold hands. "Oh, my Molly!" he whispered; and thought it was fancy that she stirred a little.

Tita sprang back to his side—dirty, dishevelled, and determined.

"Quick!" she cried, for there were no seconds to lose. "Is it that? Do you mean it?" She bent down swiftly, and put her hand on Molly's soaking clothes till she found her heart. She had seen drowned people before, and Molly—she shrank back.

"Can't you wait?" Moulton had turned

on her savagely. "I know I'm bound to you—and I love her! When she came to me to save you, I told her so; and she wouldn't listen. But you can listen. I love her." And, as if the woman he had asked to marry him were an insect that flew in his face, he swept his hand over his eyes, and bent over the girl.

For the last time Tita laid her hand on his shoulder. She would say nothing about her share in to-night's work—let him find it out or not; she did not care.

"She's not drowned, nor half drowned, Billy; she's only fainted," she said; she could not help being contemptuous. "You've saved her. And you needn't worry about me. I give you to her. Lift her when you can, and bring her after me."

She knew all in one instant what she must do; if she were beaten, she did not show it. She made her way back to Kilgore, standing silent, watching a man carrying his daughter carefully, like a child.

"Who is it?" he said. He dared not ask if she were what she looked; his red face was haggard in the lantern light.

"It's the Micmac," said Lygon casually; he took the lantern and swung it high.

Kilgore saw nothing but a dark face bent down, ragged clothes, stained hands; the typical half-breed of the border. His passion broke out beyond all bounds.

"Put her down!" he shouted; "damn you, put her down!" He made a furious rush at the man, who had never even seemed to hear him, and felt a hand on his arm.

"Wait," said Tita, gripping him. "Don't you see it's a lie? I told you not to buy on a falling market; keep still, and be glad you haven't bought. Lygon to tell you Molly met a Micmac half-breed! Lygon! Can't you see who it is? Moulton. You knew he had a camp across the swamp!" She had long ago discovered that he and Frank Labrador were the only people who did. "And if it weren't for him, we'd never have

seen Molly again; he kept her from drowning. Can't you understand? It's Billy Moulton who's with Molly."

Kilgore began to stammer.

"Do you mean——"

"I mean she nearly lost her life to-day, because Mr. Lygon saw fit to take away the only guide she had in the swamp, and that Moulton saved her. Surely you knew they knew one another. And—can't you see?" she flashed.

And Kilgore saw.

The man had bent his head over Molly, spoken to her, got her to her feet with his arm about her; and kept it there.

"Moulton!" said Kilgore to himself stupidly; he had never thought of flying so high for Molly as Billy Moulton. He moved forward stiffly, and Molly called to him:

"Father! Oh, father, I didn't mean to frighten you!"

What Moulton said, Tita could not hear: she had no time for it. Labrador, ugly, instructed, was standing beside Lygon, and

Squires, with a queer look on his face, behind him; it was her chance. She made an imperceptible sign to the Indian, and he answered it by a look at the two odd men from the camp.

"What did you mean by taking away the only guide she had in the swamp?" asked Squires, with a look at her, and a comprehensive nod at the blackness below them.

"Ask Rex Lygon," said Tita slowly. "Or no—I'll just tell you first what he told me—and a little more! You knew he wanted to marry her, but I don't suppose you knew she hated him, or——"

"It's very interesting," interrupted Lygon sharply. "But really Tita, I think it will keep. I was naturally anxious—and I —of course, I've made a mistake."

"You're quite right; it's very interesting," said Squires; he was suddenly approving of what, in cold blood, he would have despised. "Or—what, Mrs. Marescaux?"

"Or that he followed her into the swamp the other day, kissed her by main force, in-

sulted her with suspicions about a half-breed, and finally—well, if she married Lygon himself, he would be silent! If not, he would tell Kilgore that his daughter was "—she paused. "Molly's a very young girl," she said. "It—was woman's work he accused her of. You can understand what she was like, when she came to me."

"I proposed to her, certainly," said Lygon coolly. "If she said I insulted her, that's her affair. I'm exceedingly sorry about the whole cursed matter, and that's all there is about it." He shrugged his beautiful shoulders, and turned to go.

Mr. Squires tapped his arm thoughtfully.

"It seems to me there's a little more," he observed politely.

"There's more," said Tita grimly, "and these are his own words about it. He said he saw her this afternoon, in the swamp, with her half-breed, and I need not be nervous; she'd probably be back in the morning. Also that he had gathered in her little signals that she had all over the swamp to

mark the path, because he'd told her he would be even with her, and he wished to see what Kilgore would say when she did not come home, and whether he would afterwards be persuaded into marrying her. He also said that when she saw him, she slipped from him like a hare. It was, of course, no concern of his where she ran to. I think," softly, "you'll find the ribbons he called signals, in his pocket." And she stood back, out of the way.

Lygon was speechless, except for one word, descriptive and uncomplimentary. He was no fool, and he considered the odds with four men round him, and Labrador's yellow fingers in his pocket.

Tita heard Squires burst out over the ribbons with an unexpurgated opinion of Lygon's character and conduct, saw Frank Labrador's face, and the black swamp water below them. But she stood back still.

"Well," said Squires meditatively, "I guess so!"

And at the word Lygon made his effort;

but it was just one second too late. There were four men against him, and a devil in Labrador's eye. But he fought, as he made love, thoroughly. He had disposed of one of them as Moulton came running up.

"Hullo!" said he. He took in the thing, and his face hardened. "I think this is my show. Squires! Frank!" At the imperious voice the men dropped away. For the first time, Lygon and his half-breed stood face to face.

"A little wallowing won't hurt him, Moulton," grunted Squires savagely. "It's not his fault she's alive."

"I dare say," sharply. "But, as I said, it's my show. Clear out, you men!" He stood looking at Lygon. "I think you missed it," he said slowly. "You see, I wasn't a Micmac, and—we got out! And your stolen ribbons did me a service; Miss Kilgore's promised to marry me. But I think, if I were you, I'd go."

Kilgore had come up, unnoticed, and at Lygon's look at him, spoke up with a simple

dignity that Tita had not known was in the man.

"I haven't got anything to say to you. I don't seem to have understood, and I don't want to understand now. I guess Mr. Moulton's right, and you'd better get back to Welsh's! I'll send down your things in the morning. God knows if I could keep the men off you to-night, but *I* don't know if I could try!"

Lygon, standing clear, said something; what, no one heard but Labrador. But his body had always served him well. He was gone before the Indian's arm shot out.

"Let him alone, Frank," said Moulton angrily. "We're done with him."

He walked over to Molly, and Tita drew back. Squires and Kilgore stood talking; Labrador had gone sulkily with the other men to break a way through the brush; and Moulton, her last hope for existence, was with Molly. She stood alone, with her torn clothes, and the remembrance of her last thirty dollars, for sole recompense for this

night's work. She supposed, dully, that Molly would be good to her; but she had no mind for charity. She turned wearily to go home.

As she stumbled through the bushes, she felt a hand on her elbow:

"If it hadn't been for you and your lantern, we'd never have found her," said Kilgore thickly. "While I thought that lying devil was right, I'd not have let a man stir out of camp to look for her—child of mine or not. I—I owe you everything. By Heaven, I've thought more than once you were as good a woman as walks this earth, but I know it now! I'm not going to worry you with it, don't you be afraid, while you're all worn out—but you needn't think I'll forget it! Nobody ever said Jim Kilgore forgot."

The simple kindness finished out the long agony of the day, the rending shock of Lane's death, the grief, anxiety, the fear of scandal.

Mrs. Marescaux, the fashionable, the ex-

clusive, the tired-out, forgot that Kilgore was twice as rich as Moulton, forgot that he was self-made, and that a clever woman could improve his manufacture out of all knowledge, and that here was a way out of her troubles that she had, perhaps, once counted on. She collapsed forlornly, and without premeditation, on Kilgore's strong shoulder, and began to cry.

"Molly," said Moulton, as they came out on Kilgore's clearing, "look: it's dawn. And—hark!"

The two stood in the ghostly glimmer that heralded the east. The homely lights of the shack burned pale in it, the tents showed grey and warm, and somewhere, far out in the silence, there came a call.

"The loons!" said Molly. "It was like this—the first time." She caught her breath with the wonder of it, as she looked round on the dim world that was hers, and his—alive, young, warming to day—and felt his hand catch hers with comprehension.

"There'll always be an answer now," he whispered, bending down to her, "I had to pretend—then! But this time"—he laughed as a man laughs perhaps twice in his life—"I'm going to speak English. You dearest, loveliest, bravest person in all the world"—his eyes found hers in the twilight. "Is that plain?" he demanded.

"Yes—no, it's coloured!" she retorted hastily. But he took no notice.

"I've got everything I don't deserve, and I'm going to marry you." He held her gravely now, as, through the quiet, the far-off loon called vainly. "Well?" he asked, very low.

"Well," said Molly Kilgore, after the Micmac fashion that means all things. The rose of dawn was on her face as, out of the east, the loon's mate answered him.

THE END

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The micmac

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